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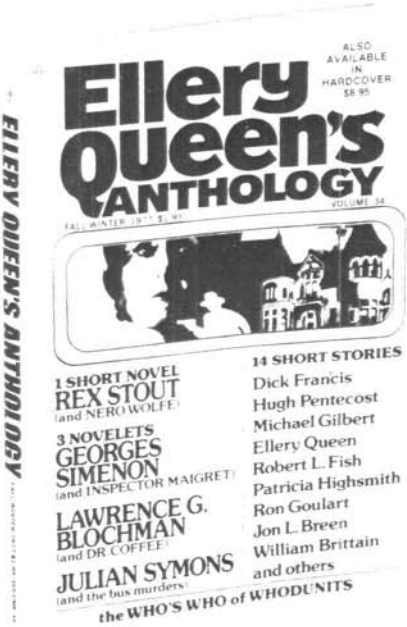

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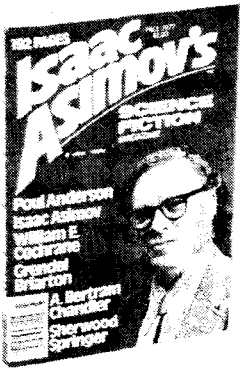

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concluding the Jason Dark series by

HUGH PENTECOST

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Quadrant International, the great multinational corporation, was Jason Dark's enemy—Quadrant International, dealing in billions of dollars' worth of guns, tanks, planes, chemicals, computers, technical experts, and expertise, dealing with all comers, of whatever political persuasions, in what is today called the Third World. Bribery, corruption of governments and individuals, terror tactics against the helpless—these were the everyday techniques of Quadrant.*

Jason Dark, stumbling across some evidence in the form of tapes and notes, had been brutally tortured in an effort to get that evidence back. His right hand, now encased in a black glove, was really not a hand at all, only a plastic replacement. That had been the price of his silence. That had also remotivated his life. One man—one man with only one hand —dedicated himself to destroy the man who had given the orders to cripple him, dedicated himself to destroy the empire that supported that evil man. One man, literally single-handed, against Quadrant International? It would have been an absurd notion—to anyone but Jason Dark.

In the preceding stories of the series—"The Dark Plan," "The Dark Gambit," "The Dark Encounter," "The Dark Maneuver," "The Dark Intuition"—men in high places at Quadrant had been sniped at and brought down by this mild little man who looked more like a retired schoolteacher than a tough crime fighter. Some Quadrant schemes had been frustrated. Now, retaliating, Quadrant has found the way to stop Jason Dark's vendetta . . .

"Q"

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THE DARK GAMBLE: End of the Trail

by HUGH PENTECOST

Jason Dark had known fear many times in his life. In 22 years as a tough cop he had faced many situations in which he had known fear. In five years as a private investigator there had been some very bad moments, like the night when two men had hacked off his right hand and left him to bleed to death in New York's Central Park. The violence of that moment had been too great for him to be aware of fear. That had come the next day, lying in a hospital bed, his life saved by a Park policeman. How could he live and function with only one hand? That produced fear. How could a cripple hunt down his cripplers? Those questions produced a cold sweat of fear as he lay there, staring up at the whitewashed ceiling.

He had known fear, pinned down in a back alley by a sniper on the roof of an overhanging building. He had known fear in a locked room with a time bomb ticking away in a safe that he couldn't open with his uneducated left hand. He had known fear driving down a narrow mountain road, careening from side to side, aware that someone had tampered with his brakes.

Jason Dark had never felt that fear and courage were incompatible. You knew fear, but you had the courage to cope with it. A man without fear was a man without imagination. Dark knew when there was danger around him, when you had to be afraid of it. He also knew exactly what his capabilities were for facing that danger. Never, until this morning, had he felt that the odds were worse than fifty-fifty against his surviving.

This morning Dark was afraid of Youth.

Jason Dark, in his early fifties, was a short square little man whose deceptively mild eyes stared at the world through slightly tinted wire-rimmed glasses. He looked more like a retired schoolteacher than a man who had dedicated his life to fighting the violence that man inflicts upon man.

This morning he sat with his back to the windows of the living room in his East 40th Street duplex apartment, his plastic right hand covered by a black glove buried in his jacket pocket. He was studying his visitor—and he knew fear.

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Alex Clement had been sent to him by a trusted friend as a foreign correspondent. for *Network News* who "may be able to lead you to a path you've been trying to find." From the moment Clement had walked into the apartment, however, Dark had felt a jolt of fear induced by a situation he knew he wasn't equipped to battle.

He couldn't fight Youth. He couldn't fight what he had to describe as a kind of male beauty. He couldn't fight a sparkling charm. The instant contact this young man made with the girl who opened the front door to him was like the excitement of the hunter who spots game—the response of youth to youth without any words being spoken. These were dangers Jason Dark knew he couldn't evade and wasn't equipped to fight.

All his life until a year ago Jason Dark had been a loner. There had been women in his life, but none who mattered. And then Sharon Evans, blonde, lovely, in her mid-twenties, had found herself in the middle of one of Dark's adventures—and found herself in love with this gentle-tough older man. He wanted her so much and yet he argued fiercely against any sort of permanent relationship. "I'm old enough to be your father! My life is no kind of life for you."

But she had replied, "Life without you is no kind of life for me."

One night he came home and there she was. She had moved into his apartment, bag and baggage. His life was turned around. There were things in this relationship he hadn't imagined existed. Two people seemed to become one. Deep inside him Dark knew it couldn't last forever. Some day someone more nearly the right age for Sharon, with her kind of glorious vitality, would appear on the scene and that would be that. He should be thankful for all he had had, he told himself, but the thought of losing her was the most excruciating fear he had ever known.

When Alex Clement stepped into the apartment this morning, Dark felt his heart jam against his ribs. With nothing tangible to base it on, instinct told him that this was it.

Clement, knowing nothing of the relationship, assumed that Sharon was a daughter, or a secretary. The thought that she might be an old man's love, an old man's world, never occurred to him. That was the way Dark saw it. Twenty-five or twenty-six, Dark thought—just about Sharon's age.

"Thank you for seeing me," Clement said to Dark, but his eyes were on Sharon as she brought coffee from the kitchen.

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"Bob Maclyn is an old friend," Dark said. It was Maclyn, in the State Department in Washington, who had suggested he see Clement. *He may be able to lead you to a path you've been trying to find.*

He may be able to turn my life into something bitter and empty, Dark thought.

"I have been stationed in the Middle East for *Network News* for the last ten months," Clement said. He watched Sharon move over to the window seat just to the right of Dark. She was smiling at Clement. Was it the polite smile of a hostess, or was something electric passing between them?

"You and I, unaware of each other, have been working along the same line, so Maclyn tells me," Clement said. "Quadrant International."

Quadrant International was one of the biggest of the multinational corporations, bigger than any three Middle East countries put together—dealers in tanks, guns, planes, pharmaceuticals, computers, suppliers of technical experts and expertise. Jason Dark, on a case unrelated to Quadrant, had come across an informer who talked of the bribery of foreign government officials, the corruption of local politicians by Quadrant.

Dark had made tapes of the informer's stories and stored them away for future use. Then he had been trapped in the kitchen of a restaurant in the city where his informer had set him up. Two men in ski masks had strapped his hand to the butcher's block, demanding the tapes. They had crushed and then chopped his hand to pieces. He had managed, in his agony, to keep the hiding place of the tapes secret, because he knew he would die if he revealed it. Since then Dark's one goal was to find the man who had ordered his torture and to destroy his empire, Quadrant International.

"Maclyn told me the story of your hand," Clement went on. His eyes moved toward the pocket where Dark's black-gloved plastic hand was buried. There was curiosity, not sympathy, in the look. "You have reason to believe that the men who did this to you were hired by Quadrant. Maclyn says you had some documents or tapes they wanted."

Dark nodded. Maclyn had done a lot of talking to this young man. The State Department man must trust him completely to have told him so much.

"You couldn't identify those men if you confronted them again?"

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"They wore ski masks and gloves," Dark said. "No uncovered flesh."

"My assignment in the Middle East was an in-depth study of terror and terrorists," Clement continued. He seemed to be addressing what he had to say to Sharon, not Dark. Trying to impress her, Dark thought. "We are living in a time when hijacking, kidnaping, the mass murder of innocent people—like the slaughter of Israel's Olympic team at Munich—is a way of life. Holding hostages for political gain is move one between governments, between governments and corporate entities. An endless battle for power with human life having little or no value. Your friends in the ski masks didn't kill you because they think your terror will be so great the next time that you'll give them what they want."

"The next time!" Sharon's voice was a frightened whisper.

"There will be a next time," Clement said. "The name of the game is to get what you want—by any means."

Dark produced a cigarette with his left hand, put it between his lips, lit it with a lighter held in his left hand. He had become expert with that left hand over the months.

"I have been aware of that," Dark said. "I have been trying to get to them before they get to me."

"But why have they waited eighteen months to strike at you again, Jason?" Sharon asked.

"May I guess at the answer?" Clement asked, giving her his brightest smile. "Whatever Mr. Dark has is not dangerous to them right now. It probably will be dangerous to them when they make some move in the future. They tried to get it early. Failing, they attracted attention to themselves. Too many people know about Mr. Dark's war against Quadrant. To destroy him now would result in too many questions being asked. But sometime—maybe tomorrow, maybe six months from now—they will have to get what they want or risk a failure they can't afford."

"You haven't told me anything I don't know, Mr. Clement," Dark said. "I have been living on borrowed time." He glanced at Sharon. "I know that. Maclyn indicated you could give me some concrete help. Lead me to a path I've been looking for—that's the way he put it."

Clement took a little cigarette-sized cigar from a flat box in his pocket and tapped it on the back of his hand. "Trademarks, Mr.

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Dark," he said, "I kept thinking about what has happened to you while I was talking to Bob Maclyn. Terrorists in the Third World have a way of dealing with their enemies—and their own people who turn to private crime. A murderer is murdered in exactly the same fashion that he did his own killing—a bullet if he shot someone, a knife if he knifed someone, a garroting if he strangled someone. A thief—his hand is cut off."

Clement held a lighter to his little cigar. "In their eyes you are a thief, Mr. Dark. You stole information from them. I can think of a dozen better ways to make you talk than hacking off your hand. But if I were controlled by ancient traditions I would automatically think of the accepted way my ancestors had for dealing with a thief."

"But Jason was attacked here, in New York City, in America!" Sharon said.

"The assassins, the hijackers, the torturers and kidnapers come from all over the world," Clement said. "You want a man wiped out in the airport at Jerusalem, you hire a hit man from Japan. You want a British diplomat eliminated in London, you import your killer from Spain. If the killer is caught he has no record, no traceable connections in the country where he's working. An outfit like Quadrant can reach out to find a hit man anywhere in the world. They chose men from the Middle East to work on you here in New York, Mr. Dark. What they did to your hand proves that to me—the Third World punishment for a thief."

Dark fought with impatience. He wanted to put an end to what he sensed was a special exchange between this handsome young man and Sharon. "It's an interesting theory," he said, "but it isn't any real help to me."

"But if you knew where to look?" Clement smiled at Sharon. He was, Dark thought with a touch of anger, showing Sharon how clever he was. "Three days ago," Clement went on, "I was strolling down Fifth Avenue when I saw a man I knew from another time, another place. This man, a Palestinian, had performed some violent acts for Quadrant in the Middle East. He is a murderer, a torturer, an expert at sophisticated violence."

"So you went to the police?" Sharon asked.

Clement shook his head. "No proof, no solid evidence. If I went to the police I'd probably be murdered in my bed before the next sunrise. But I was curious, so I followed this man."

"He has a name?" Dark asked.

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"He probably has a dozen names," Clement said. "In the Middle East I heard him referred to simply as The Man. A genius in the art of violence. As I say, I followed him. He went to a small renovated brownstone on East 63rd Street. I saw other dark-skinned Moslem types come and go from that house. Not strange there, you understand. That part of the city has stopped being curious about foreign types. The United Nations. But here, I thought, is a little nest of violent men."

"With no reason to think they had anything to do with this," Dark said. For the first time he took the black-gloved plastic hand out of his pocket and rested it on the table.

"I made some discreet inquiries," Clement said. "I learned that the owner of that brownstone is Richard Harkness of Harkness Chemical."

Dark felt his stomach muscles tighten. Harkness Chemical, he knew, was a subsidiary of Quadrant International. Clement might have something.

"I still don't understand why you haven't gone to the police," Sharon said.

Clement gave her a charming if slightly patronizing smile. "In my business you keep alive on tips, on secret sources of information. Let it become known that you will pass what you know to the police or other law-enforcement agencies and you are done for. I badly want to know what cooks in that house on 63rd Street, but I can't go to the police. It occurred to me that Mr. Dark might run risks I can't afford to run. It occurred to me that by doing him a favor he might, in turn, do me a favor."

"Such as?"

"An exclusive account of what you discover at 63rd Street," Clement said.

"And if I refuse?"

Clement shrugged, smiling. "A gamble I'm taking," he said.

Dark looked down at his black-gloved hand. The man responsible for it might now be within reach. He would owe something if that turned out to be true.

"I can reach you, I suppose, at the offices of *Network News*," he said.

"I'm staying in a friend's apartment," Clement said. "Trying to put ten months of work into some kind of readable order. I can give you a phone number in case you need to call me."

Clement wrote down a number on a slip of paper Sharon

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supplied. He also wrote down the exact address of the house on 63rd Street. At the door he smiled down at Sharon who had followed him there.

"May I call you sometime?" he asked.

"If you think it's worthwhile," she said.

Dark sat still, staring down at his hand, as the door closed on his visitor. And then she was beside him, her arms around him, her cheek pressed against his.

"You idiot!" she said. She laughed. "Do you really think I could be interested in that brash young clown? Oh, Jason, my darling, you surprise me. I had thought you were quite grown up."

He held her close, and his world started to come together again.

There is a vast difference between a routine, fact-gathering, note-taking detective and the genuinely great crime hunters and crime breakers. The difference, Jason Dark knew, was an intangible thing, an instinct, a built-in alarm system, a kind of personal radar. He remembered as a child reading about some hero whose faithful horse refused, even when subjected to whip and spur, to cross a bridge. Seconds later the bridge collapsed into a raging torrent that would have killed both rider and mount. Instinct? Some kind of psychic alarm system? Once in his career Dark had ignored the warning that came to him from his own special instinct for danger. It had cost him his right hand.

Dark had heard men say they had "a hunch" about a situation. They were, he thought, the kind of men who draw to an inside straight at poker and go broke. It wasn't just a hunch he had about the house on 63rd Street. He was inundated by private warnings.

There was nothing noteworthy about the house, an old-fashioned brownstone, except something lifeless about it that Dark couldn't quite define. Venetian blinds were drawn over the windows facing the street, presumably to guard against the bright afternoon winter sun. Clement had seen men come and go from the house, but after two hours of watching, Dark had seen no one. If the people who lived there were involved with the United Nations, the place could be deserted until the afternoon sessions at the world organization were finished. It would be an ideal time to let himself into the house and have a look around, but the inner warnings against such a move were almost physically painful. Years ago, until he had learned to trust those feelings, Dark had

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thought he was afraid. He knew better now. Something was wrong.

New York City is a repository for millions of tons of records, files, special information. If you knew the right place to go, the right person to ask, you could find out almost anything that was important to you. After watching the house from various places along the block, after going around to the rear and coming up a back alley without seeing any signs of life, Dark decided to make sure of his facts. He called a friend who worked in one of the offices that handled city records.

Clement had been right. The house on 63rd Street belonged to Richard Harkness of Harkness Chemical. The connection with Quadrant International was there—it was real. He had mistrusted Clement because he was jealous of his youth, his handsome face. For once he had allowed his instinct to be fouled up by the fear of losing Sharon. She was right. He'd reacted like an adolescent.

But something more than instinct was involved in his reluctance to proceed. Experience told him that things that came easy must be examined closely. Clement had pointed out a place to him which was almost certainly used by terrorists hired by Quadrant. All he had to do was choose the right moment to walk in and catch them red-handed, perhaps the very men who had maimed him a year and a half ago. He wanted so urgently to square that account; he could taste the moment of revenge. And yet both instinct and common sense warned him off. *Wait—wait* for some sign of life!

Almost directly across the street from the house was a little fruit and grocery store. *GARDELLA'S*, the sign read. He had seen school children and workmen enter and leave. Gardella's made sandwiches and sold fruit, cheese, and pasta products. Dark went into the store. A dark-skinned little man, probably Gardella, smiled at him. Dark selected a McIntosh apple and asked for a piece of Vermont cheese he saw displayed.

"That house across the way, number 123, is it occupied?" Dark asked.

Gardella shrugged. "Sometimes," he said. "I think people from the U.N. use it. Years ago a family lived there, but no more."

"I wondered if it might be for rent or sale," Dark said.

"I don't know," Gardella said. He scowled at the building. "I see people come and go, but they don't shop in the neighborhood."

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"Recently?" Dark asked.

"How's that?"

"You've seen people come and go recently?"

"Sure. Last night I see men—three or four—go in."

"And you saw them come out?"

Gardella shook his head. "But I don't watch all the time when I'm busy."

Dark reached in his left-hand jacket pocket for a cigarette. "Damn!" he said. "I forgot that my lighter is empty. I'll buy a tin of lighter fluid from you, Mr. Gardella. Might as well make it a large one. I'll be taking it home."

Winter darkness came a little after five. There were lights everywhere except in the Harkness house. Jason, his topcoat collar turned up, went around the block and came up the alley in the rear. On his first trip he had seen two large metal trash cans filled with torn papers. He had noted there was no food garbage, only paper. He took out of his pocket the can of lighter fluid he'd bought at Gardella's and doused the contents of both cans. His lighter, working perfectly, started two fires. He hurried down the alley and to a phone booth on the corner. He called in a fire alarm, then walked quickly around to the front again. Others had seen the flames and smoke and people were gathering outside the house. If there was anyone inside they would surely emerge now.

Fire equipment came barreling down the street. People shouted at the firemen, indicating that the fire was in the back yard. Jason waited for someone to come out of the house. No one did.

A fireman came out of the alley. "Seems to be in the garbage cans," he said. "But we'll have a look inside, just to be sure."

The words were hardly out of the man's mouth when there was a thunderous explosion from the back of the house, the sound of shattering glass, and someone screaming.

A fireman, his face cut and bleeding from broken glass, came staggering up the alley.

"Whole damn place blew up when we got the back door open," he said. "Couple of guys blown to hell and gone. Oh, God! Must have been a gas leak or something."

Jason Dark walked away, his blood like ice in his veins. His instinct had been correct. The place had been booby trapped for him. Two men had died in his place.

It was a little after midnight, hours after the explosion on 63rd

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Street. Jason Dark stood outside the door of an apartment on the tenth floor of a modern residence building in midtown. He had rung the doorbell and was waiting, his hands jammed deep in his overcoat pockets.

The apartment door opened and handsome young Alex Clement faced his visitor, a look of almost comic surprise on his face. Clement was wearing an overcoat, and Dark saw a suitcase standing just inside the door. It appeared the young man was just leaving.

"Man, am I glad to see you!" Clement said.

"Glad?" Dark stood quite still, his face an expressionless mask.

"It's been all over TV and radio," Clement said. "The house on 63rd Street. There's been an explosion of some sort. Did you know? Two firemen were killed."

"I know. I was there," Dark said.

"Well, come in, for God's sake," Clement said, opening the door wide. "I was concerned. I was afraid you might have been in the building. I half expected to hear they'd found a third body. They say it may have been a gas leak, set off by a fire that started in some trash cans outside the building. Come in."

Dark stepped through the doorway into a small undistinguished apartment. His hands were still in his pockets.

"They 'say' it may have been a gas leak, but they know it wasn't. It was a carefully planted booby trap. Two of them. Anyone who opened the front or back door was a dead man."

"Good lord!" Clement said.

"You were going somewhere?" Dark said.

"My friend, whose apartment this is, is coming home unexpectedly. I was about to find myself a hotel room somewhere. I have the makings of a drink if you'd like one."

"Thanks, no," Dark said. "But make one for yourself. It may be a long time before you have another one."

Clement's eyes narrowed. "I don't follow."

"I'm about to take you in on a murder charge," Dark said, "or at least as an accessory to the murder of two firemen."

"You have to be kidding!" Clement said.

Dark took his left hand out of his pocket. In it he held a small photograph. It was of a dark young man standing by a fountain in some foreign city. "Recognize this man?" Dark asked.

Clement frowned and shook his head. "I don't know him," he said. Then the corners of his mouth moved in a small bitter smile. "Maybe I can guess, though."

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"Who better than you?" Dark said. "The man in the picture is, of course, Alex Clement of *Network News*. The photo was taken in Beirut last month."

The handsome young man turned away toward a portable bar in the corner of the room. It seemed he needed that drink.

Dark returned the picture to his pocket. "It took me some time to track it all down," he said. "After the explosion I knew you'd set me up. It was totally out of key for Alex Clement, an established and reputable reporter. Oh, I realized Clement might have been bought by Quadrant, but I had to be sure. I checked with *Network News* and this snapshot was the result. I checked with my friend Maclyn in the State Department. It turned out he didn't know Clement personally. When you called him on the phone and told him you were Clement, he passed you on to me. All you had to do was to persuade me to go into that house on 63rd Street to look for my torturers and you would have done the job you were paid to do—set me up for death."

The young man at the bar poured himself a drink. "Why didn't you go into the house?" He didn't seem at all concerned, only curious.

"Something smelled suspicious about it," Dark said. "Some instinct warned me. I thought your terrorists might be waiting inside for me. So I set the fires in the trash cans, thinking I'd smoke them out. I called the fire department and, indirectly, caused the death of two men. You're going to pay the price for that, my friend."

"I rather doubt it," the young man said. He swallowed half of the drink he'd poured.

Dark's left hand came out of his pocket again and this time it held an efficient-looking handgun. "I'd like nothing better than to have the excuse to spatter your brains right here on the carpet," he said.

"That could be the greatest mistake of your life," the young man said, and finished his drink. He was suddenly quite businesslike. "Things don't always work the way we plan them," he said. "But Quadrant always covers its people. I think I'm going to walk out of here and that you'll make no attempt to stop me."

"Try," Dark said, his voice flat.

"First, I suggest you call your apartment and talk to your Miss Sharon Evans," the young man said. "Or rather, try to talk to her. She isn't there, you see."

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Dark didn't speak. His finger was dangerously tight on the gun's trigger.

"Some hours ago, just in case," the young man said, "your Sharon Evans was taken into custody. If you have any hope of seeing her again, you will stand aside and let me go. In a couple of days, when I am safely away, you will receive instructions as to how you may be able to get her back." The bright smile that he was afraid had charmed Sharon lit up the young man's face again. "I do hope, for her sake, your instinct tells you I'm not bluffing."

"If she has been harmed—" Dark said, his voice unsteady.

The young man walked calmly over to his suitcase and picked it up. "A piece of advice, Mr. Dark, because I suspect you are, at heart, a decent guy and I know you are a better than good investigator. You have been working for months to find the man at the top at Quadrant who gave orders to have you crippled. That's horse-and-buggy thinking. There is no one man at Quadrant who controls the show. Knock off one top man and another slips immediately into his place. You're fighting a system, Mr. Dark, not a man. You haven't got a chance, you know. But you just might get your girl back if you do what they want you to do." The young man made for the door. "See you around," he said.

Dark aimed his gun steadily, then slowly lowered it. They had him, he knew. They had him cold.

(continued on page 121)

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"All that is required for the success of evil," said Harry Stello, the barber on campus, "is that good people do nothing." Of course, the barber with the encyclopedic mind was not the first person to say that, but he believed in it heart and soul . . .

THE RESCUE OF PROFESSOR PARKINSON

by WILLIAM BANKIER

The students chose Professor Parkinson as their kidnap victim because he was the best-liked member of the faculty. This was part of Rick Maxwell's plan. He explained it to Nettie Bryce and the others when they were barricaded in the library building.

"It will be a real bummer for the rest of them to imagine old Parky deprived of his freedom. That will make it easier for us to negotiate. They'll have to give us what we want."

"But we won't hurt him, will we?" Nettie was as fond of Parkinson as anybody. She was in her second year of English Lit. and he was the main reason she came to class. His lectures had an air of being gossipy, casual, private conversations. Yet, at the end of a semester, you discovered that a lot of important ground had been covered.

"No, this is not a violent thing," Maxwell reassured the group. "That's why I chose the library as our fortress. We can hang in here forever and there's no way they'll use tear gas or fire hoses with all these valuable books around. And then we've got our final persuasion thing."

Everything in Maxwell's vocabulary was a "thing." He flashed his warped grin, the face that fascinated some of his friends and frightened the others. "If they dig their heels in, we can always threaten to burn the place down, first editions and all."

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In his prison, a windowless storeroom at the end of a long corridor leading from the main library reading room, Joseph Parkinson sat in a crumbling leather armchair and considered his situation. It could have been worse. Nobody had manhandled him on the way here. They had simply asked him to come along to a special meeting and then, in their loud, slightly uncivilized way, had told him he was to be kept in this room until further notice.

Supper had been no worse than he was given sometimes at his lodgings. And they said they had plenty of beer down the hall. He might take them up on that later. It would help him sleep.

The lock in the storeroom door rattled and the door was opened by the Maxwell boy. He came in followed by Nettie Bryce who gave the Professor a self-conscious smile.

"I thought I'd come in and explain this hostage thing," Maxwell said.

"I was hoping somebody would." Parkinson knew Maxwell as one of the brainier lads in the university but one who had little use for the raw materials of education that the institution made available. He was in too much of a hurry to waste time in tedious academic pursuits. Life, to Rick Maxwell, was a series of encounters with other people in which you either won or you lost. You got ahead by organizing and manipulating these people. He had been born with an aptitude for this sort of activity and by the time he reached university he was an expert. It would have been pointless for him to attend classes, to study and write papers. He was busy creating social structures with himself at the center.

The Professor glanced at the young girl in her smart denim suit, the ultimate extension of the laborer's clothing that had become the uniform of her generation. She came from a moneyed family and had done well in school up till now. But this year she was opting for excitement and there was no telling where it would end.

"How are you, Miss Bryce?" he asked.

"I'm fine, Professor Parkinson. If there's *anything* you need—"

"The Professor only needs information," Maxwell said. He sat on the end of the cot facing the old man in the leather chair. "This detention will be over, hopefully, in one day. We've presented our demands to the Board of Governors and they're considering them now."

"And what demands are those?"

"Three things. One: that student representatives be elected to

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the Board of Governors and attend all meetings pertaining to university business.

"Two: that these student representatives take part in the interviewing and hiring of all instructors for every faculty in the university.

"Three: that the student representatives have the power to dismiss any instructor whose methods do not conform to standards set by the students."

Maxwell sat back with a radiant expression on his face and grasped a knee between locked hands.

Parkinson said, "Is that all?"

"Those are our minimum demands."

"Put simply, you kids want to be allowed to run this place entirely your own way."

"We want to be involved, yes."

"I'm afraid that means I'm going to be your prisoner for a long time. There's no way the Governors will agree to that."

Parkinson was right. After three days negotiations were ended and the issue looked as if it had become a stalemate. It was in the midst of this unhappy situation that Harry Stello, the campus barber, appeared at the library as if to provide comic relief.

He was an ordinary-looking man except for his totally bald head which somehow seemed especially ludicrous on a barber. Of course they called him "Hairy."

He came in carrying his portable kit of scissors, combs, straight razor, and can of shaving cream, and asked who was in charge. "I am, Hairy," Rick Maxwell said. The student leader wore a thick ginger beard and his haircuts occurred every couple of years, like droughts and other acts of Nature. So he did not see Stello professionally, but he knew the barber's reputation as a bit of a character. "What's your problem?"

"I'm here to give Professor Parkinson his shave. You know how clean he always looks—not like you barbarians. I've been shaving him every day for years."

They liked being called barbarians; the word suggested aggressive, untamed people who usually had their way with decadent, civilized populations. They laughed and crushed beer cans in their bare hands.

"You sure you won't talk him to death while you're in there, Hairy?"

Stello shared the barber's universal reputation of being a

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compulsive monologist. But either the university environment had rubbed off on him or else he had come here because of his tendency to be an omnivorous reader. Whatever the case, Stello drowned his customers, not with baseball trivia or gossip about movie stars, but with a flood of information drawn from history, literature, science, and music. He read anything, forgot nothing, and all the characters and events of history and fiction were as pertinent to his thinking as the events described in the daily newspaper.

"Well, it's just like this guy Raskolnikov," Stello would say, busily trimming sideburns. "He kept going back to that room where he axed the old lady, and dropping in to visit the policeman who was investigating the case. He never let up till they did him a favor and put him away."

Or, while using the blower on wet hair: "What I wish somebody would explain to me is the philosophy of those ancient Greeks. Here's this poor guy, Oedipus. He'd been tossed out by his mother and father when he was a baby, his ankles riveted together, left to die on a hillside. But a shepherd takes him to another country and when he grows up he happens to come back and kill his father in a scuffle on the highway, not knowing it's his father. Then he marries the widow, not knowing it's his mother. Okay? None of this is *his* fault. It's *their* fault. But when he finds out, he takes out his own eyes and goes around cursing himself for the terrible crimes he's committed. But he didn't do anything; it was done to him. Can you explain his guilty attitude?"

Yes, Hairy Stello was one long laugh around the university with his big bald head stuffed with knowledge, the information overflowing from his mouth while he snipped his scissors and pocketed his tips.

Now Rick Maxwell said to him, "By the way, how's that encyclopedia you swallowed, Hairy? Still giving you trouble?" Hearty locker-room laughter echoed from the shelves of silent books.

"Very funny. Can I go in and give the Professor his shave?"

"Sure you can. Show him the way, Nettie."

As Nettie Bryce conducted Stello down the long dim corridor to the storeroom she said, "I really am not with this, Harry. I want the students to have power, but I don't think we should deprive Professor Parkinson of his freedom."

"Have you said that to friend Maxwell?"

"No. I can't."

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"Then don't expect any sympathy or approval from me. People like you are the compliant majority who let the villains and madmen get away with it. There's not a tyrant in history who could have gotten off the mark without your kind standing around keeping quiet."

"I only wanted you to know—"

"All that is required for the success of evil," Harry Stello interrupted, "is that good people do nothing."

Alone in the storeroom with Parkinson, he said, "Well Professor, how are you making out?"

"Better with you here, Harry. My face was starting to itch." He began to remove his necktie. "A shave is a great idea."

The barber laid out his kit. "I've got a better idea than that," he said. "I've figured out how to get you out of here."

Parkinson smiled, but he shook his head. "No way, I'm afraid, old friend. Any move in that direction and there's bound to be a struggle, which means precious books would be destroyed. We can't have that, can we?"

As he stropped his razor, Stello looked smug. "They won't even know you're gone. I got the idea from a similar situation in real life. Out of that book, *Brief Lives,* by John Aubrey. The English guy who wrote all about the lives of people he knew back in the sixteen hundreds."

"I know the book," Parkinson said. "But which event are you referring to?

As he performed his usual efficient shave under difficult conditions, Harry Stello explained exactly what he was planning to do.

Five days passed during which the stalemate continued and the national as well as the local news media became involved in covering this classic confrontation between youth and the Establishment. And on each day Harry Stello came in to give the prisoner his regular shave. A routine was established; each time it was Nettie Bryce's job to conduct the barber down the hall to the storeroom. On one of these occasions they talked again.

Harry said, "How would you like to do nothing, say nothing, just one more time. But this time on the right side?"

A flicker of furtive relief appeared in her eyes. If some other strong leader was going to appear and oppose evil, it could mean a chance for her to get off the hook.

"What do you mean?"

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Harry told her briefly. Then he asked her about the sleeping schedule in the main reading room out front, and what time the shifts of guards went on watch. She told him.

So it was on that fifth day, when the morning shift had been aroused and were drinking coffee while the previous team were bedding down, that a stranger arrived at the library door. He had curly blond hair, a drooping mustache, and horn-rimmed glasses. He explained that he was a neighbor of Harry Stello's. The barber's wife was suddenly not well and wanted him back right away. The stranger headed for the door to the corridor.

"Did Stello come in this morning?" the student said.

His companion leaned over Nettie Bryce who seemed to be asleep. "Hey, Net, is Hairy with the Professor?" He nudged her but she lay quite still, breathing deeply.

By this time the stranger was on his way down the long corridor. A few minutes later he returned with Harry Stello following him. They were in a hurry. "Sorry I have to run," the barber said. "Illness at home. I told Parky I'd be back to finish his shave as soon as I can."

Professor Parkinson took off the blond wig, mustache, and glasses in front of a battery of press photographers and a TV camera, then stood with his arm around his rescuer, Harry Stello. He let the barber tell the story.

"I got it out of John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*. Back in 1610 William Seymour, the Duke of Somerset, was imprisoned in the Tower of London by James the First. His barber, a guy named Batten, showed up in disguise one day and said he wanted to talk to the barber who, he claimed, was already in the cell with Seymour. They sent him in and in a couple of minutes he came out, as Batten the barber, with the disguise now transferred to the Duke. It's a crazy scheme, but it worked then and now it's worked again."

Later Parkinson and Stello were sitting over a meal at the faculty residence; the police and reporters had left. "In a way I'm sorry the insurrection collapsed," the Professor said. "I always feel some regret when these wild student enterprises come to nothing. They have such flair."

Stello tipped his head back. "Come on," he said. "With all respect, I must differ. Those kids are losers. If they'd spend less time holding their teachers prisoner in libraries and more time reading the books on the shelves, then they'd have my sympathy."

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A Gallic tale of great élan—about the miracles of La Fleur . . .

THE WATERS OF LA FLEUR

by D. G. BLANKENSHIP

"Monsieur Le Telegraphe! Monsieur Le Telegraphe!" That is what the children call to me as I walk down the street. The uniform, no doubt. Still, it is a distinction to operate the telegraph in a little village such as La Fleur. What other link do they have to all France and the world? Was it not I who first told my people in March that Prince Bismarck had been dismissed by the new German Kaiser? A telegraphist learns many things.

Pierre and Gaston used to run and call out to me years ago, but, of course, they are now no longer children. I always thought of those two as brothers, not in blood, but in spirit. Maybe because they both wanted to get out of La Fleur so badly, yet neither knew quite how.

Gaston was always the clever one. His wit charmed the young ladies and his clothing did too. He was always faithful to the newest and most radical fashions, tailored for him alone in Paris. He had been to that beautiful city more often than anyone else in the village, with the possible exception of his late father. Gaston had even been to La Grande Exposition last year and went to the top of that new Tour Eiffel where he assures me that with clear weather you can see America in one direction and Russia in the other. With enough money, Gaston would surely live all his days in Paris. With enough money, mon ami, who would not?

Gaston's family had had wealth at one time and aristocracy too, but had lost the one that made the other seem important. Gaston's mother died when he was but a child and Gaston's father had been a man to teach his son that a sou in the hand was a sou to be spent. He contended that as long as a man had creditors there would always be someone to wish him a long life. Unfortunately, Monsieur Renard's creditors could not prevent his death when a cart lost control at a race and Renard, always at the front, was struck. Having failed to save a life, the creditors

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contented themselves with taking the chateau and leaving Gaston only a small fund and some personal items with which to finance his wardrobe and adventures.

That is why he came to Pierre. Not that Pierre is rich; au contraire. He was left the farm when his parents died, but it was a small farm and made little money, especially with Pierre alone to work it. He was not an enthusiastic laborer. A lifetime of farmwork had not made him any fonder of it and if he could have found a buyer, he would have sold immediately. The farm raised swine and by close association with them Pierre had learned in detail why it is an insult to call a man a pig. Pierre was more than ready to listen to whatever his friend Gaston had to say.

The scheme was simple. They would work miracles. It took Gaston some time to explain the plan to Pierre. They sat in the small farmhouse and drank absinthe that Gaston had brought from Paris.

"Not real miracles, Pierre, though if there should be a true miracle, eh bien, so much the better. It would not be pious to forbid God to help us in our work."

"But the Church," Pierre protested, "how can we defy all that is holy?"

"There is no need to defy the Mother Church. The bishop will help us. I know many things about him. He will not refuse."

"I am still uncertain."

"Pierre, consider the ways of the world. On Paris streets the blind are not blind, the lame are not lame, and all the beggars are rich. So, if the miracles of La Fleur are less than miraculous, are we not making our village more like the beautiful capital? Have you no civic pride?"

"None."

"Then consider the fortune to be made from such an enterprise—a fortune sufficient to remove both of us to wherever we wish."

"That I will consider. Keep talking."

With those words Gaston relaxed and began to explain his plan.

"There is a pond on your farm."

"So far, Gaston, you have not startled me. It is my farm, I know there is a pond here, but really you joke when you call it a pond. The stream runs inside the boundaries, near the railroad tracks, and empties out, but it is more of a bog than a pond. The whole place stinks of sulphur."

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"Maybe it was a mineral spring once."

"Perhaps. All I know is that the birds will not drink from it and even the hogs won't go near it."

"Hogs have no sense of religious duty. Also no money. People have both. All that remains is to convince them to spend both at your pond, the scene of the miracles. Pierre, in Paris I have seen men who make their living by popping their bones in and out as though they were chickens being readied for the pot. Some do it as beggars in the street, others as contortionists in the circus. It is all the same. Suppose one of these appeared in La Fleur twisted like a grapevine, had a holy vision commanding him to drink from the waters of the Escroque pond, drank those waters, and became straight and agile. A miracle, no?"

"No, but it might work. You say the bishop is dependable?"

"Absolutely. What I know about him, it embarrasses even me to think about."

"Good. With the bishop to proclaim it the will of heaven, who is to deny it?"

"We will construct a fountain, a shrine," Gaston mused.

"And charge admission to it?"

"That, mon ami, would be crass. One does not require a ticket to see the works of the Almighty. One merely sells curios."

"Of course! Religious articles. Rosary beads dipped in the waters!"

"Bibles, medallions of the saints!"

"Pottery made from the clay at the bank!"

"It is the Bank of France, Pierre!"

"We are rich, Gaston!"

The two danced around in the dark little room for some time. The absinthe was nearly gone. It was very late and even the frogs and crickets had ceased their nocturnal music. It would be an irony, but the humans probably woke up the bugs with their revelry.

Soon, though, the two conspirators grew tired with the hour and with the spinning of the room after their enthusiastic dance. They again sat on the rude wooden benches at the little table and began to speak of the details of their plan.

"We will need more than one demonstration," said Pierre. "One miracle may bring people from as far as Arrondin, but a series of miracles will bring tourists and pilgrims from all of France."

"It will be easy to arrange. There are many unfortunates in

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Paris who will happily be cured of their deformities at our fountain if we put a few francs in their pockets. I have a friend in the capital who is completely reliable. Tomorrow morning I will telegraph all the details and he will see to everything for us."

"Excellent," said Pierre and he invited his friend to spend the night there to save himself the long walk back to his rooms in the village. Gaston thanked him and remarked that while the rates Pierre offered were attractive, the atmosphere preferred by the other guests forced Gaston to return to his own accommodations. This was something Pierre could understand. They said bon soir and Gaston returned to the village.

I saw Gaston the next morning. He looked none too good, but I was called to Paris on business that same afternoon. I took a carriage to Arrondin and from there caught the railway for the rest of the journey. Two days I was gone and when I returned the work that had accumulated! But it is a comfort to know that one is needed by his people.

Word spread that Gaston wished to sell some of the few items he had left from his father's estate. Most of the townspeople believed he was preparing for another trek to his tailors, but the truth was that he and Pierre needed working capital for their enterprise. Gaston's friend in Paris was willing enough to make the appropriate arrangements, but he made it clear to Gaston that he had no intention of subsidizing the effort with his own funds.

The first contortionist was on his way, but he insisted on being paid on arrival. Since Pierre had nothing to sell (the market was glutted with hogs at that time and even the idea of mortgaging the farm was a joke), it fell to Gaston to raise the initial sum. He did not mind, however. Their plans had grown. They now envisioned a macadam road to the fountain—they always referred to it as the fountain now—a sumptuous pavilion for wealthy travelers, and a concession stand from which they could sell pastries and frozen custards to the pilgrims.

For many years I had admired an antique fowling piece that had been given to Gaston's grandfather by a gunsmith who had done work for the court of Louis Philippe. The craftsmanship was excellent, the stock being of polished African ebony, and it was inlaid elaborately with silver. Ah, there was pride in one's trade then, but today? Eh bien, I thought Gaston would be willing to sell the heirloom, so that evening I determined to ask him about

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it and to offer him a fair price. After inquiring about the village, I heard that Gaston had gone to visit Pierre again, so I set out for the Escroque farm.

There was no one in the house when I arrived, so I began to wander about the farm and in a little while found myself approaching the pond. The night was warm and still, so I heard the voices from a good distance away. I could tell that it was three men, not two, who were talking.

My curiosity aroused, I continued toward the pond, but cautiously and with the silence of a mist. There was dense undergrowth and I was able to get quite near the men without being observed. I crouched behind a berry bush and listened.

Pierre and Gaston were talking in a businesslike way with another man, a stranger to La Fleur. They were giving the new man, a Monsieur Fard, I believe, instructions. M. Fard was to enter La Fleur in the most ostentatious manner possible and twisted as grotesquely as his skill allowed. Pierre asked for a demonstration of M. Fard's talents and the sight which followed made me grateful for having dined lightly that evening. Satisfied with the performance, Pierre and Gaston continued to give M. Fard the proposed schedule while he busied himself with returning to human form.

"You must be certain to draw a crowd," Gaston emphasized, but Pierre assured him that that was the least of their worries. Gaston continued, "Proclaim loudly that you have traveled many miles because you have seen a holy vision that only the waters of the Escroque pond can again make you whole."

"Worry not, Monsieur. I can be most convincing."

"Do not try to come here immediately." It was Pierre this time. "Wait until you see the bishop. He will just happen to be in the village that day and will also happen to see you standing, or whatever, in the street. Then he will come to you, look deeply into your eyes, and announce to the crowd that you have indeed seen sacred lights. It will be the bishop himself that will encourage the people to follow you out to witness the miracle."

"Of course, Monsieur. And once here I will bathe in the waters and be cured."

"No. You must drink the waters."

"But surely that is not necessary." He glanced at the stagnant pool and his nostrils quivered slightly. "Perhaps if I merely applied mud from the pond to my twisted limbs?"

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"M. Fard, you must drink the waters. The largest profit to be realized from the venture is from the water itself. We intend to bottle it and sell it all over France, all over the world as a sacred elixir and purgative. You can see, Monsieur, that this would be impossible if you did not drink from the pond."

"Very well," M. Fard replied slowly. "I suppose if I am to perform creditably tomorrow, I should sample this, this liquid now."

"We are going to insist, I am afraid," Gaston said firmly.

I had tasted one of the berries on the bush in front of me and had quietly spit it out. If the taste of berries watered by the pond was so abominable, think of drinking from the pond itself! M. Fard, obviously a man of great courage and greed, did not hesitate. He scooped up a large draught of the water and drank it at once, trying to grimace as little as possible. He then turned to his companions and began to talk again about the details of the next day's events. Suddenly he shrieked in a manner to frighten the stones themselves and fell to the ground in convulsions.

Action was needed. I ran out to them, forsaking my hiding place, and kneeled beside Fard, who was writhing on the ground. I looked in his eyes, steadying him with my arm, all the while explaining quickly to the astonished Pierre and Gaston that I had merely come to inquire into the purchase of a gun. M. Fard had stopped thrashing around and was now quite still.

"This man has been poisoned," I said. "I have seen it before. I will do what I can but—wait, it is already too late. He is dead."

The expressions on the faces of the two young men cannot be imagined. I removed my cloak and with ceremony placed it over the motionless form of M. Fard.

"Monsieur Le Telegraphe," Pierre began, "we had no idea. We did not want this." There were tears in his eyes. He and Gaston then explained the entire plan to me, though, of course, there was little I did not already know. They continued to call me Monsieur Le Telegraphe and I was touched to hear the same form of address they had used so many years before as children.

They were distraught and did not know what to do. M. Fard was not the only one, others would follow. Gaston's friend in Paris knew everything. Perhaps Fard had relatives who knew he was here! There would be inquiries, questions. Even if they could prove that the death was accidental, how could they explain the swindle plan? It would surely come out and they would be jailed

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if, indeed, the villagers did not kill them. They pleaded for my advice. I could not refuse.

"You cannot remain here. You must leave the village tonight," I said after some thought. "I will dispose of the body and make some sort of explanation. I have some influence, so I think I can prevent the authorities from pursuing the investigation. But some word of your plans will certainly leak out and I will not be able to help you unless I can convince the Prefect of Police that you have left the village and will never return."

"But my farm, Monsieur!"

"I will buy it," The look of gratitude on Pierre's face was a beautiful sight. "I had come with francs in my pocket to purchase Gaston's gun, but perhaps you will accept it as a down payment on the farm and allow me to send the remainder to you."

"Of course, Monsieur—any amount you consider fair," said Pierre.

"Send it General Delivery to Paris," Gaston added.

"It is, perhaps, a small sum for a down payment," I said, "but it may serve you well for expenses during your travels. And I would strongly counsel you to begin those travels at once. You must gather what you need and get underway. I can send you the rest."

So many mercis! They almost wept their gratitude, but time was short and they left. I was alone with the pond and the lamented M. Fard.

I have not been in touch with Pierre and Gaston since, except to forward their belongings and the remaining sum for the farm. Ah, yes. Gaston left me a final note that night. I found it on my doorstep as I came home. The note was attached to a large, hastily wrapped package. It was, of course, the beautiful fowling piece. It now occupies a place of honor on my mantel, but will not remain there long. I plan to move to larger quarters.

A telegraphist learns many things, as I have said. Sometimes a man may try to arrange a deal with a friend in Paris and a busy telegrapher will entirely forget to send the message. Such things have happened, especially when the wires are crowded with news of important business. Pour exemple, the exchanges between the central office of the railroad in Paris and their agent in Arrondin. They certainly seemed insistent that he find appropriate property for the new La Fleur depot. They were so precise! It must be near existing tracks, of course, and have a ready source of water for the boilers, and be a little outside the village so as to accommo-

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date the construction of a switching and repair yard.

They have, you may be happy to learn, found the ideal property. I know this because I myself was present at the closing of the transaction and drank a toast with the railway agent and with Monsieur Fard who, of course, was my employee, and who had been staying with me since first coming to La Fleur, a few days before. I tried to convince him to settle in our little village, but he insisted that he must return to his work in Paris. And so, a humble telegraph operator becomes a wealthy man. A miracle, n'est-ce pas?

DETECTIVERSE

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

by JOHN LARGE

I savor each tale that you edit
(Just name any story, I've read it)
And though I must say
That crime doesn't pay,
I still give it plenty of credit.

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a *NEW* Milo Turner story by

FRANCIS M. NEVINS, Jr.

Plutarch wrote: "Zeno first started that doctrine that knavery is the best defence against a knave." Zeno, Plutarch—then Bohn, who phrased it, in his HANDBOOK OF PROVERBS, *"Set a thief to catch a thief." And we would guess that Eugène François Vidocq, with his vast knowledge of crime learned from both sides of the law, believed in, and practiced, the maxim. So, if "set a thief to catch a thief" is invested with truth, would not "set a con man to catch a con man" be equally valid? Let's try the new proverb for size . . .*

TO CATCH A CON MAN

by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, JR.

The headquarters of Executat Business Equipment was a monolith of glass and black marble, 30 stories tall, surrounded by a square mile of landscaped shrubbery and ugly abstract sculptures. A floor-to-ceiling sheet of tinted glass made up the west wall of the office where I had been dickering with the big brass, so that I had a gorgeous view of the sun sinking over the tops of the skyscrapers downtown. But I was impervious to the beauties of the scene. What preoccupied me was the scam I had been asked to pull by the heir apparent to the seventh largest fortune in North America.

"Still reluctant, Mr. Turner?" The mellifluous voice of Whitfield Shaw wafted across the opulent office at my back. I could see his reflection in the window wall—imperially slim, touch of gray at the temples, pipestem tapping against the glistening mahogany of the desk. He looked exactly like a Marine colonel turned business tycoon.

I turned my back on the view and dropped into a tan leather

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visitor's chair. "But, Colonel Shaw, I am not a thief," I insisted politely. "I appreciate your flying me here in the company's jet, I'm grateful to you for lavishing so much hospitality on me since I got in last night, and $75,000 plus all expenses is a reasonable fee. But bunco's my game, not burglary. Would you ask an eye doctor to take out your appendix?"

"The job calls for a man of your unique talents," Shaw said. "The cleverest thief in the world wouldn't carry out the assignment relying on a thief's skills alone."

"We know," the third man in the room cut in. "We asked her." It was a hell of an admission for a member of the bar to make, but J. Stephen Sloane hadn't become chief counsel for Execustat without taking a few risks. He was a chunky carrot-topped functionary who wore bifocals and popped a breathmint into his mouth every few minutes.

I had to concede that it was the most scrumptious offer I'd had in months. A confidence man is like a professional writer: if he runs out of ideas he starves. Since last winter I had been suffering from the functional equivalent of writer's block and living on my capital. If I agreed to bail out the Dawes successors, I'd have enough for at least another year. But the whole setup gave me a severe abdominal twinge.

The scam sounded absurd, but then the entire Dameron Dawes success story was a network of absurdities. The kid from Rapid City, South Dakota, who had become a multimillionaire before he could vote by going into automated business machines and reprography just before the industry boomed and by pyramiding coup on coup until the pressure of going on three hours' sleep a night brought on a coronary and ended his life at the age of 38. That the succession to his empire should hinge on stealing a sheaf of mediocre love poems he'd written in his teens was just par for the course.

"Let's go over the facts again." I spun my chair to face Shaw. "Dameron Dawes became a paranoid recluse after he got rich. He lived in fear that someone would rip him off by forging his signature, so he signed only the barest minimum of papers. He'd give instructions orally to you, and with your power of attorney you had the day-to-day control of Execustat. But like most of us Dawes never gave a thought to the fact that some day he was going to die, so he never made out a will.

"Then he has that coronary while he was in the company jet. So

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he grabs a sheet of Execustat stationery from his briefcase and jots down a holographic will leaving everything to you. Witnesses aren't necessary on a holographic will, and luckily for you that kind of will is still legal in this state. Dawes dies before the pilot can put the jet on automatic and go back to give him first aid and the will is found in his pocket when the plane lands. If you can convince the probate court that the handwriting on the will is genuine, you're a mogul. If not, a small army of Dawes's distant relatives will claim intestate shares."

"Neatly put," Shaw murmured. "Steve, could you have summarized it so well?"

J. Stephen Sloane popped a breathmint. "We combed through company records back to when it was founded," he said, "trying to locate clearly authentic samples of Mr. Dawes's handwriting which the court could compare with the will. Nothing was turned up but a few specimens of his signature. At the preliminary hearing Judge Manford stated that we would have to produce additional and longer handwriting samples before he would accept the will for probate. Another hearing is set for next month."

"And then two weeks ago the lady enters the picture," I said. "A widow named Constance Young from some place called Monckton, Pennsylvania, who claims she went to high school with Dawes and has a sheaf of adolescent love poems he wrote her in 1955."

"That part checks out," Sloane reminded me. "There was a Constance Young who was enrolled in the same high-school class with Mr. Dawes. And our detectives located three other classmates who recall Mr. Dawes's, ah, infatuation, although it appears Miss Young favored the captain of the football team."

"And she is demanding one hundred fifty thousand dollars," Shaw added, "for the poems and her testimony at the probate hearing. She sent me a photocopy of one of the poems to convince me that what she was offering was genuine. According to the examiner of questioned documents we retained, the handwriting of the poem is the same as the handwriting of the will."

"So by hiring me to rip off the poems," I pointed out, "you save roughly $75,000."

"More than that," the ex-colonel responded. "The whole thing might still be a clever confidence racket. It's part of your mission to find out if it is. Who is better qualified to detect a swindle than another swindler?"

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"And if I bring you the poems and they check out as genuine, you'll pay Miss Young's price as well as mine?"

"Execustat always deals fairly," Shaw said unhesitatingly. "That's how it attained its position." He projected such an image of the honest capitalist that I was almost ready to close the deal on the spot. I retraced my path across the deep-piled carpet to the window wall and studied the twilight smog-veil over the city. By the time the sun had vanished so had my qualms.

"We're in business," I told him. "I'll take one-third of my fee in advance plus a copy of the Dawes will and a copy of the sample poem Mrs. Young sent you. Oh, yes, and copies of the reports from those private detectives you've had shadowing her."

We worked out the fine points in the private dining room where Dameron Dawes in his time had played host to many an eminentissimo of the business world. Silver chafing dishes bulging with exotic nibbles lined the oak sideboards, and the dinner that came course by course out of the executive kitchen would have made a James Beard drool.

"One of our men will go with you to Monckton," Colonel Shaw advised me as we dined. His own meal was a deluxe chef salad—ham, turkey, cheese, and cherry tomatoes atop a bed of three kinds of lettuce, with Caesar dressing and a goblet of Lillet vermouth on the rocks with a twist of orange. "Just to safeguard the company's interests. His name is Smash Landrigan."

I looked up in mild shock. "If I need help on the job, don't you think I can find the right people myself?"

"You'll never find a man like Landrigan. He was my first sergeant in Korea and I got him a security guard's job with Execustat after he'd put in his twenty in the Corps. He was Dameron Dawes's personal bodyguard the last eight months of Dameron's life."

"He would have been on that jet with Mr. Dawes when he died," Sloane remarked, "if he hadn't shattered a kneecap falling down a flight of stairs the week before." The lawyer's dinner consisted of a huge stuffed veal breast, baked potato, zucchini, hot buttered rolls, and a garnish of breathmints.

"He's a superb man in the field," Shaw said, taking a sip of Lillet, "and a true diamond in the rough."

I was in my hotel room the next morning at eight when a thundering sounded at the door as if a wounded bull elephant were

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demanding entrance. I made haste for the door and threw it back. What stood in the corridor was six and a half feet tall, looked to weigh about 320, and had a face like an H-bombed landscape.

"Turner?" the landscape rumbled. "Colonel Shaw says I'm s'posed to tag along wit' you while you're—"

I didn't need three guesses to figure out that the human mountain had to be Smash Landrigan. His sudden irruption left me with about two seconds before he spilled the whole scam to half of the guests of the hotel.

"Shut it!" I whispered urgently. "Didn't they ever teach you about security clearances? Suppose the guy across the hall happens to be a cop?"

"Oh, no way, buddo, da cops don't come to a fancy dump like dis."

"Smash," I said, sighing. "As long as we're together, let's pretend you're back in the Marines, okay? You be the first sergeant and I play commandant. Understood?"

A slow stupid grin spread over his face. "Yeah, sure, buddo, if dat's what turns you on. When we climbing on da big boid, huh?"

We jetted out of the city before noon, with me traveling coach and Landrigan in first class because he couldn't fit in a tourist-class seat.

At Pittsburgh we switched to a local line that serviced the medium-sized cities of western and middle Pennsylvania, and when we deplaned at Monckton Memorial Airport we cabbed to a chain motel near the junction with Interstate 80 where I checked us into separate rooms. Landrigan's turned out to be equipped with a king-sized conventional bed and mine with a waterbed. He wanted to switch but I vetoed the idea on the basis that he might break through the mattress and drown himself. I slipped him a twenty and told him to go out and gobble a few dozen roast-beef sandwiches as hors d'oeuvres before dinner. Then I lay back on the gently rocking bed, punched the pillows into a headrest, and settled down to study the peepers' reports on Constance Young.

From the photos the local Lew Archer had snapped she looked to be in her late thirties but still attractive in a schoolteacherish way. She was tall and slender and wore her blonde hair in a bun. She'd been married for twelve years to a real-estate broker in Donnellson, Iowa, named Arthur Webb, who had died a year and a half ago. Five months ago the widow had come to Monckton, re-

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sumed her maiden name, rented a nine-room house in what had once been the upper middle-class section, and lived the life of an urban recluse. The detectives' reports said she did not go out socially; maybe the pain of losing her husband hadn't worn away yet. She had savings and checking accounts in the Merchants' Bank of Monckton but no safety-deposit box. Her house had an electronic alarm system connected to all the doors and windows so that she was just about invulnerable to the garden variety of burglar.

Armchair or rather waterbed detective that I was, I made a deduction: the love poems of Dameron Dawes were somewhere in that house.

I lifted the phone from the night table, laid it on my middle, and placed a long-distance call. It was time to pay my respects to Jock Schultz, proprietor of the world's only human supermarket, and through him make contact with some local talent.

Luck graced me with her smile. The Jock was in.

"Ah, Milo me lad, I was afraid ye'd dropped off the face of the earth. And where are ye now? . . . Monckton, ye say? And how may I serve ye this fine smoggy day?"

"Nothing complicated yet, Jocko," I told him. "Just some guys who can put a top on a phone, set up a safe listening post, and keep their mouths zipped."

He thought about it for perhaps a minute, then gave me some names and phone numbers. I have never been able to figure out how he does it. A few of us in the profession think he's really a robot from Alpha Centauri with a computerized brain. I thanked him, disconnected, and dialed the first number he'd given me. An hour later, in a back-street bar, I closed the deal with three brothers named Katakakis who were lying low after a bungled attempt to stick up the ticket office during the big game between the Monckton Wombats and the high-school football champs from the next county. I gave them the widow's address and a healthy advance on their fee, went back to the motel in my rented car, and composed my soul for a long and boring wait.

Downtown Monckton is a delightful place to visit for about five seconds. The gunk from the steel mills that support the city hangs in the air like a corpse rotting on a gallows. The community boasts a bar on every other block, three X-rated movie houses, a horde of decaying apartment buildings, and the Wombats. There

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were still a few tolerable parts of the city, and Mrs. Young lived in one of them. But most of the people with money had fled to the suburbs where multileveled shopping malls serviced their consumer needs.

Even if I hadn't been on a job where a local cop might see me on the street and recognize me from a poster, I'd have stayed in my motel room as much as possible. I delegated Landrigan, who lacked my sensibilities, to supervise the listening post the brothers K had set up in an abandoned brownstone six blocks from the Young house. Commanding officer type that I was, I took reports by phone from my waterbed HQ.

For three days after the tap was made I rocked on that bed, reading my way through a pile of blood-and-guts paperbacks about guys who called themselves The Clobberer or The Bonecruncher. At the end of the third day I had enough data to work out a plan to crack the Young fortress. I drove the rented car to the brownstone listening post, settled my bill with the brothers K, and told them to leave the tap running and await further instructions.

I wargamed the plan a few more times in my head. It seemed just ridiculous enough to work. That evening I phoned the Athenian trio again and put in an order.

"You heard me right, Spyros. A boxful of cockroaches, a truck van, some guys who need a few hours' work, coveralls for each, and five gallons of liquid insecticide. Landrigan can supervise. No rush at all. Any time before tomorrow night."

The next day I plowed through the Bonecruncher #24 through #27 while the Smasher went out to coordinate with the Greek fraternity. He pounded on my door at six that evening and clumped in carrying a two-pound candy box under his arm.

"Snack before dinner?" I inquired.

"Hell, no," he rumbled. "There is the roaches you wanted. I paid a coupla kids to collect 'em for me in the welfare projects. Wanna see?" He started to take the lid off the brightly colored box and I sprang off the waterbed.

"Freeze!" I yelled, for the cockroach is one of the few works of nature than can literally make my flesh crawl. "Get those monsters out of here! Is everything set for tomorrow?"

"Right down to the woid T," he said proudly, like a grizzled top sergeant reporting to his C.O.

"Okay then. Around midnight tonight you go out to the Young

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place, break a kitchen window, and empty that box into the house. Then you disappear, because the house is wired and a patrol car will get there in two minutes. Any questions?"

"Whaddo I do wit' the box?"

"I don't care," I sighed. "But if you bring it back here, for God's sake make sure it's empty first."

His phone call woke me from a dream of sensuous houris, sometime in the moonlit hours. "It's done, buddo," he reported. "I'm calling from that illegal phone we put in da brownstone. Boy, did I hafta sprint after I planted the roaches! That private security outfit had a car at her house before I was around the corner."

"Good going," I yawned into the mouthpiece. "Better bed down on that old couch where you are. Start getting the men and equipment lined up first thing in the morning. I'll join you out there at nine."

I parked the rented car two blocks away and reached the brownstone ten minutes before my self-made deadline. I greeted the rumpled and unshaven Landrigan, told him to take a cab back to the motel, clean up, and get a few dozen pancakes into his system. Then I sat down at the rickety card table and donned the earphones that were connected to the phone tap.

I had consumed three more paperback shoot-'em-ups before the call came through. The time was 12:36 P.M.

"Kilkenny's Killabug, may I help you?" came a voice on the receiving end of the call.

"Yes, this is Mrs. Young at 407 Jefferson. I saw some roaches in my kitchen this morning. Could you send an exterminator out as soon as possible?" She had an attractive and strangely familiar voice. "Not till tomorrow morning? You're sure you can't make it any sooner? . . . Well, all right, I guess . . . Ten o'clock tomorrow then."

I made a command decision to speed up the operation, put down my earphones, and turned to Landrigan who had come back at eleven, and was now doing pushups on the dusty floor of the room. "She called Kilkenny's Killabug," I told him. "Prepare for action."

I stretched out my legs and tried to get comfortable in the folding chair while I finished the last hundred pages of The Vengeancer #36. Then I picked up the illegal phone, dialed Directory Assistance for the number, and put in my own call to the Kill-

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abug company, using the most seductive feminine voice of which I was capable.

"This is Mrs. Young again, of 407 Jefferson. I called before about roaches in my kitchen . . . No, I want to cancel the appointment we made, I found another exterminator who said he'd come today . . . Yes, I'm sorry too." Then I made another call, this time to Mrs. Young. "Carl Oringer, Mrs. Young, of Kilkenny's Killabug . . . You'll be pleased to hear we've had a cancellation, so we can send a truck and full crew to your home this afternoon if you'll be in . . . Four o'clock will be fine, ma'am, and thank you again for calling Killabug."

Which gave me slightly less than three hours to put my act together, but Landrigan was as good a field man as Colonel Shaw had said, and we made it with a few minutes to spare. At four that afternoon an Econoline van with *KILKENNY'S KILLABUG* and a dead house pest freshly painted on both doors turned the corner into Jefferson Street and stopped in front of 407, disgorging seven overalled proletarians carrying what we hoped would pass for exterminator kits. The cast consisted of the brothers K, three overage delinquents they had recruited, and one Milo T. Landrigan had just too conspicuous a build to qualify for the team. We marched up the faded brick path to the front door and were admitted by the smiling grave-faced lady with her hair in a bun. That nagging feeling of familiarity hit me again.

We spread out over the house and squirted insecticide along the baseboards and shone flashlights into the crevices between kitchen cabinets and not only made the place hell on earth for cockroach Americanus but set up a golden opportunity for me to case the joint and look for likely hideyholes where the poems might be stashed. At a moment when the lady of the house had her back turned, I gave the signal and three of the crew descended with me to carry on our spraying in the basement. Eventually the three came back up, but I didn't. This was the point where Milo detached himself from the rest of the bug killers.

I found a heavy wooden door at the far end of the musty cellar and tugged on the loose knob till the door opened. It looked and smelled like a place where a lot of paint had been stored. It was dark and airless and smaller than many a prison cell, and I thanked the gods for it and shut myself inside. The de-roaching noises went on for about twenty minutes more, then I heard doors slamming, footsteps receding, and the van pulling away. Unless

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the widow had kept careful count of how many Killabuggers had invaded her premises, she could have no idea that one of them was still her guest.

The name of the game now was Settle Down and Wait. I stripped off my coverall and stuffed it underneath a rusty steel cabinet. With my warm shirt and slacks, and with sandwiches and a thermos of hot spiced wine in my fake tool kit, neither hunger nor cold would faze me. As long as Constance Young stayed at home and awake, I had nowhere to go and nothing to do.

As the evening wore on I kept hearing the noise of the TV through the basement ceiling. First the local news, then the national news, then the family programs, then the violent programs, nonstop till sometime after eleven P.M. when the set clicked off and I heard water running in the bathroom as she apparently prepared herself for bed.

I decided to give her an hour to fall into a deep sleep. With the aid of a pencil flash in my kit I spent the time re-examining the papers I'd packed, namely the Execustat Instacopy of the Dawes will and the copy of Dameron Dawes's first passion poem, the one Mrs. Young had sent Shaw. To my unskilled eye the handwriting looked the same, just as Shaw's examiner of questioned documents had thought. As for the literary quality of young Dameron's verse, I make no claim to be a critic but it struck me as ghastly.

My darling, mice will never eat
Our sacred cheese of love,
Nor will I e'er see buzzard wings
A-flapping on my turtledove.

At 12:40 P.M. I paroled myself from the paint-room prison and tiptoed up the chilly cellar stairs with my shoes tucked into my slacks pockets. The first thing I noticed on the ground floor was that she slept with her bedroom door closed: lucky break. I began with the living and dining rooms. I took down paintings from the walls, opened drawers, lifted sofa cushions and rugs, and leafed through book-club novels on the credenza, working by moonlight and in complete silence. Nothing.

I squatted behind the bar, squinted into empty ice buckets, and scrutinized a row of exotic liqueur bottles with names like Sabra and Chocolat Suisse. Nothing. I was afraid to tackle the kitchen because there was too much danger of a pot or pan clattering, so I

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went straight from the bar to the linen closet in an alcove between the kitchen and the dining room. Rising from the closet floor was a neat pile of old newspapers about two feet high.

Something was wrong with that tower of paper. It was too neat, too straight. I aimed my pencil flash at the dateline of the topmost paper. It was a five-month-old edition of the Monckton *Conservator*. Five months old. But it's the most recent paper that should be at the top of the heap! I picked up the newspaper and carefully shook it out.

And there it was—a sheaf of cheap lined notebook paper, browning at the edges, each sheet covered with handwriting that was now all too familiar. I shone the light at the first page.

My love, you once inspirited
My poor poetic pen,
But now it wends its way alone
Like Robin Hood without his men.

In feeble light the handwriting looked exactly like the penmanship of the Dawes will.

Suddenly I had a flash of inspiration. I unlatched my kit, removed the two photocopied sheets I'd studied in the paint room, and placed one on top of the other so that the word "will" in the will was precisely over the word "will" in the first line of the mice-and-cheese epic.

My hunch paid off. The two words were identical to the last penstroke. I performed a second test, using the word "will" in the will and the same word in line three of the poem. Same result.

That was when my ears registered a sound that didn't belong in the quiet house—a sound that froze me into a piece of sculpture. It was the unmistakable click of a pistol hammer being cocked.

"Down on the floor," a woman's voice ordered from the dining room behind me. "Spread your arms and legs out, mister, fast!"

Strangely enough for a man under a gun, I made no move to obey. Hearing her voice again had suddenly put the whole picture together. The strange familiarity of her face, those bottles of Chocolat Suisse behind the bar—I took a gamble and stayed perfectly still.

"The Surgeon General has determined that lying spreadeagled on the floor is dangerous to my health," I murmured. "May I turn around, darling?"

Her response was so low I almost missed the note of disbelief. "Mi—Milo?"

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I swung around and pointed the beam of my pencil flash at my profile. "Know anyone else who'd pick such a screwy way to crack your fortress?"

She didn't lower the pistol but kept it trained on my middle while her face went through a range of expressions from disbelief to delight to rage to consternation and back to disbelief again. I sat down on the floor to enjoy the spectacle and think a bit.

The lady and I had done business before. Two years ago, when she was calling herself Nanci Newell, I had saved a modest fortune for her by cracking a hidden message in Manhattan's Matchwit Club. She was the adopted daughter of the man who had been my mentor in the confidence profession and an aspiring swindless in her own right.

"That Shaw creep hired you to steal the poems," she said after a minute of thought.

"Well, you can hardly blame him," I pointed out. "You were demanding a hell of a high price. With the poems in his hands he could offer you, say, ten thousand for your testimony alone and make you like it. Of course that was on the assumption you were the genuine article. Since you're a fake, the poems are too, so Shaw won't want either them or you. They're damn good forgeries, by the way, which means you probably hired the best man in the business. Huey Hinkle?"

"Yes," she said, "it was Huey. Charged me top dollar too. But he did a fantastic job considering that the only genuine sample I could give him was Dawes's autograph in the real Connie Young's high-school yearbook. *I wrote the poems myself. You may not* know it but I'm a poet."

"If you say so. Okay, loved one, tell Uncle Milo how you got into this scam."

"Dawes really did write mushy poems to the genuine Connie Young twenty years ago," she explained, "but Connie threw them away as junk. I met her last year in L.A. and thought she was a very neat lady, but she's got about fifteen things wrong with her kidneys and can't afford the dialysis machine she needs. So I worked out the idea of writing a new set of poems like the ones Dawes wrote, getting Hinkle to forge them in Dawes's handwriting, and borrowing Connie's identity long enough to sell them to Shaw as evidence in the probate case. I've got the real Connie holed up in L.A. under an alias. Oh, Milo, you're not going to blow the show, are you?"

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"Darling," I told her gently, "you have just handed me a delicate problem in ethics. We've been buddies and I don't want to take the dialysis machine from your neat lady, but I was paid to do a job and you can't stop me unless you pull that trigger, and if you do the neighbors will hear the shot and call the cops, and you have no way to get rid of a corpse on two minutes' notice, so even if you shoot there goes your scam."

I made one of the crazier decisions of my career and backed gingerly to the linen closet where I bent down, still facing her, and picked up the sheaf of verse. She bit savagely on her lower lip, but her finger didn't tighten on the trigger. Poor kid, that was one reason she'd never make a great con woman. Beneath her liberated veneer she was as soft and tender as a rabbit's nose. I walked across the room and gently took the weapon out of her hand.

"Look," I told her, "I'm getting well paid. Suppose I split my fee with you and you can get the kidney machine with your half and we'll fly down to Aruba or Curaçao and soak up sun on my half, okay?" A stray tear was slipping down her cheek and I kissed her lightly. "But you'd better start clearing out of here right away. By tonight Shaw's handwriting expert may tell him he thinks the writing on the poems is a forgery, and then the cops will be pounding on your door."

I folded the poems and stuffed them into my exterminator kit underneath the thermos of gluhwein. "When you're settled, let the Jock know where you are and I'll get your share to you. Sorry it turned out this way, kid." I opened the front door and let myself and my bunny nose out into the Monckton night.

I walked the six blocks to the brownstone listening post where I'd told Landrigan to wait for me. A few taps on the door were enough to get him to open. He was baggy-eyed and unshaven and his suit looked long slept in.

"Battle's over, we won," I said as we went into the operations room. "Rip out the phone equipment, wipe anything that might have prints on it, pack up whatever could incriminate us. When you're done we'll go back to the motel for some sleep, then we'll take a flight back to HQ in the afternoon." I was counting on the delay giving Nanci a few extra hours to vanish.

"Lemme see whatcha got, huh?" Landrigan rambled.

"Why, Smash, I had no idea you were a poetry freak." I bent to

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undo the latches on the exterminator kit and show him the Prize. With one knee on the floor, all of a sudden I heard that sickening click again.

I was afraid to look up but I did anyway. Sure enough, the big ape was pointing a silencer-equipped automatic at me.

"I think I'll read them later," he said. "I doubt that they measure up to the work of Robert Lowell who is my favorite modern poet."

I was too full of outrage to be as scared as I should have been with a Colt Combat Commander aimed at my left ventricle, but I was sensible enough not to make any quick moves. "Landrigan, what the hell are you trying to pull?" I demanded. "And how come your moiderous accent suddenly evaporated?"

He grinned at me the way a big kid grins at a little kid who still believes in Santa Claus. "People expect a large ugly man to sound like a Damon Runyon character. I've found it gives me excellent protective coloration in my work for Colonel Shaw. Did you really believe he would pay you $75,000 when he can pay me ten thousand and eliminate the risk of you ever blackmailing him like Hinkle?"

He smacked his lips as if anticipating an evening with a new volume of Robert Lowell, and went on, "While you were impersonating a roach hunter I found a nice dump at the edge of town. Your last role will be that of sanitary landfill—uh—buddo. After I dispose of you I have to pay a call on Mrs. Young, and then my mission will be completed. Now take those poems out of the box and lay them on the card table."

From where he stood the raised lid of the kit blocked his view of the inside so that he couldn't see the sheaf of papers at the bottom of the box. That little circumstance gave me one sliver of a chance to come out of this with my vital organs intact. "I stuffed them in the thermos for safekeeping," I mumbled innocently, and lifted the insulated cylinder out of the kit, unscrewed the cup, and nonchalantly tossed the cap onto the card table.

And threw what was left of the hot gluhwein smack into his ugly face.

He let out a yowl of anguish and pawed at his eyes with his free hand. I sprang to my feet jack-in-the-box style and aimed the hardest kick of my life at his kneecap. It had an even chance of hitting the knee that had been shattered. There was a sickening crunch and a scream tore out of him as he crashed to the floor.

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Luck of the Turners. I kicked the Colt out of his hand and swatted him with the metal folding chair.

Then I sat down on the cold floor myself, breathing hard, trying to get my bearings. Why had Whitfield Shaw given Landrigan secret orders to erase me? With millions of dollars under his control, why would a piddling $40,000—my $75,000 fee minus my one-third advance and Landrigan's $10,000 execution fee—lead him to order my murder?

And then someone turned on the light bulb in my skull.

The only genuine sample of Dameron Dawes's handwriting that Nanci had given to Huey Hinkle was an autograph in a high-school yearbook. But the poems Hinkle had produced for Nanci included at least two words that had clearly been traced from a copy of the Dawes will. Therefore Hinkle must have a copy of that will to work from when he forged the poems. *Which meant that he had forged the will too!*

And then I saw something else. If Shaw knew enough to commission a fake Dawes will from Hinkle in time to plant it on Dawes's corpse when the company jet landed that fateful day, then the so-called coronary that had killed Dawes was probably something a lot more sinister. It was beginning to look as if Colonel Shaw had murdered Dameron Dawes in a bid to take over the Execustat empire.

It was natural enough that Shaw would go to Hinkle when he needed a forgery; Huey was the best there was in that line. But later, when Nanci had hired him to forge some more of Dawes's handwriting, Huey saw a golden goose staring him in the eyeball. So he had taken a copy of his own forgery of the Dawes will, traced words from the will into the poems so that there would be complete proof *both* were fakes—no one ever writes words *exactly* the same—then charged Nanci top dollar for the poems, and then went back to Shaw and put the bite on him. If the colonel didn't pay Hinkle's price, Huey would send copies to the probate court with an anonymous letter explaining what they proved.

I snatched up the illegal phone that still sat on the card table and placed a long-distance call to the Jock. "It's Milo, old pal. Sorry to wake you at this hour but a lot is riding on what you tell me. Jock, how can I get hold of Huey Hinkle?"

"Ye can't," the Jock replied sleepily. "Unless ye've got a phone hookup with the cemetery. They fished Hinkle out of the Los Angeles River two weeks ago."

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Score one more for the Smasher, I thought. I thanked Jock profusely and hung up. So much for Shaw's answer to Huey's attempt at blackmail. No wonder the colonel was so desperate to get hold of the sheaf of forged poems and kill anybody who might make the connection between them and the forged will. Including both me and, as Landrigan had said, Nanci; probably Hinkle's use of the poems had convinced Shaw that he and Nanci were in the blackmail game together.

I spent twenty minutes wargaming my counterattack, then I made another call. After the third ring her voice came, weak, frightened. "H-hello?"

"Me, darling. Don't talk, just listen." I explained why I had gone AWOL from Shaw's army, told her of the fate she and I had barely escaped, and then I outlined what we were going to do to the unsavory militarist who had set us up.

We had to close down the listening post, get Nanci safely out of Monckton, and put Landrigan into cold storage for a while. I called up the brothers K, and with their help we wrapped it up in a few hours. The brothers took Smasher off to a quiet soundproof place and then in the dreary hour before dawn they broke into the gym of Monckton High and stole the videotape unit the Wombats used to record their practise sessions. It took all the next morning and part of the afternoon before Landrigan cracked under the brothers' ministrations and told us the works. By cocktail time I had replayed the videotape of his confession and was ready to make my pitch.

I knew that Landrigan must have been reporting secretly to Shaw on a regular basis, so after twelve hours of hearing nothing the colonel must by now be twisting slowly, slowly in the wind. At 5:05 I stepped into a booth in the Monckton bus station and made a person-to-person call to Execustat headquarters. Colonel Shaw was not amused by either my words or my tone.

"Now wait a minute, Turner!" he cut in. "You can't accuse me of—"

"The hell I can't. Some friends of mine took your hit man to a cozy corner and practised a few interrogation techniques I found in these blood-and-guts paperbacks you see on the newsstands. They work. Landrigan spilled his head off. So unless you personally bring me $200,000 in unmarked fifties and hundreds by midnight—that's the $150,000 Mrs. Young asked you for, plus the

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$50,000 balance of my fee—a videotape of Landrigan's confession goes to the cops and the TV networks. And I don't give a damn whether the tape's admissible in your murder trial, because Judge Manford in probate court will hear it, and when he does your world will go bust. You going to pay?"

It took him one minute to make up his mind, but when he spoke again he showed that they hadn't promoted him to colonel for nothing. "I'll pay, damn you," he whispered fiercely. "When and where?"

The when was midnight and the where was an underground tunnel beneath the airport in a city about halfway between Execustat headquarters and Monckton. The airport with its high domes and multi-tiered decks and Plexiglas looked like a leftover set from a science-fiction movie. An escalator led from the baggage claim area down to a little private subway line that connected the air terminal with a high-rise hotel that stood like a steel-and-glass needle half a mile away. Every eight minutes a string of tiny electrified cars completed its circuit around the oval track. It was in one of these subway cubicles that I closed the deal with a chalk-faced Shaw.

He handed me a gray attaché case bulging with green rectangles and I gave him the sheaf of forged poems. We sat side by side on an orange plastic seat as the little train made its circuit and I counted bills. When I was satisfied I told him to sit tight for one more round, exited at the airport station, and as soon as the car was out of sight I used a pay phone to call the youngest brother K who was waiting by another phone in the all-night coffee shop on the main level.

"All's well," I said. "Call your brothers back in Monckton and tell them it's okay to let Landrigan escape. You're sure he heard what I told you and your brothers to say after I left?"

"He heard," the Athenian assured me. "He'll go home convinced Shaw crossed him and made a deal with us to take him out."

"Okay. Bring me the tape right now."

In three minutes the kid came loping down the escalator, handed me a blue flight bag, counted out a liberal helping of bills from the attaché case for himself and brothers, and escalated upstairs again. I waited another two minutes for the little subway to click and clack back into port. When it whispered to a stop I stood in front of Shaw's cubicle and tossed in the flight bag containing

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the videotape of Landrigan's confession.

"Make one more circuit," I told him, "just to give me time to get away. After that you're on your own. I hope some day you try playing cute with another guy in my line, and I hope he slices your nose off."

Whitfield Shaw was white as a freshly laundered sheet and his hands were jerking in his lap, but he wasn't completely licked yet. "How—how can I be sure this is the tape I'm paying for?" He gave the flight bag a little kick. "It could be a blank reel for all I know. And even if it is the tape, you could have made copies so you can bleed me dry buying them back one at a time."

Poor baby. He'd masterminded two murders and planned two more just to get rid of a possible blackmail threat, and now the real thing smacked him in the chops. Served him right. "Milo Turner always plays fair," I said. "That's how he attained his position. I leave the crude kinds of chiseling to amateurs like you. See you in the brig, Colonel."

I had eight minutes before he'd be back, maybe with a gun; he had knuckled under much too easily. I raced up the escalator and slipped into the men's room near the baggage area where I bought myself ten cents' worth of solitude and hefted the attaché case a few times. It felt heavy to me. I took out the cash and arranged it around my middle in two moneybelts, then when the case was empty I picked it up again. It still felt too heavy.

I wiped my prints from the case with toilet tissue and lowered it gently into the wastebasket under the paper-towel dispenser. Then I picked the lock of the equipment closet at the back of the room, removed the OUT OF ORDER sign they hang when they're cleaning the toilets, and stuck it on the entrance door as I left the men's room. I jogged across the terminal and down one of the nine concourses that radiated out from the hub. Halfway down the long concourse I spotted a bank of pay phones, slid into a booth, and made a quick call to the airport administration office.

"This is the Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Nations. There is a gray attaché case in the wastebasket in the men's room near the baggage claim area, the one with the Out of Order sign on the door. Your bomb disposal unit had better hurry." I hung up, checked my watch, and bolted down the concourse like a man who has just heard the last call for his flight.

The departure lounge for the 1:00 A.M. whisperjet to Minneapolis was almost empty, but Nanci was waiting for me, her eyes bright

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with tension and fatigue. As I trotted into the lounge she leaped up and threw her arms around me or the money on me or both.

"You cut it damn close," she breathed, snuggling against me. "Everything okay?"

"Except that there may be a small explosion here after we're airborne. We'll catch the six o'clock milk run, Minneapolis to L.A., and meanwhile Landrigan will make his way back to Execustat convinced Shaw sold him out and paid the brothers K to kill him. When they meet again, he'll probably pick Shaw up and throw him right through that window wall on the top floor of the building."

"And we buy my neat lady her kidney machine?"

"And a month in Aruba for us, my colleen," I versified; and with our arms around each other's waists like a honeymoon couple we raced out into the crisp night to catch our plane.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Schlock Homes story by

ROBERT L. FISH

Schlock Homes pries again—this time in an adventure that brings the Bagel Street Bloodhound to New York City on the trail of cigarette smugglers. Homes's analytical ability was never more profound, nor his deductions more calculated to dumfound, spellbound (forgive, please), and confound. And yet this brilliant triumph of manner over mind proved to be one of The Master's "greatest failures"—which is really saying something . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ANIMAL FARE

by *ROBERT L. FISH*

It is a rather well-known fact that my friend, Mr. Schlock Homes, is the author of many scholarly monographs, covering subjects as diverse as the proper selective method for collecting cricket cards to the interpretation of instructions for the use of do-it-yourself kits. His erudition and inventiveness have often been demonstrated and given proper disclosure in connection with the many cases where his genius has revealed itself; his analytical ability and his musical talents have also long been recognised. But what is not so well known, possibly, is that in April of the year '76, on our visit to the colony of New York, he discovered the wireless—what the colonials call a radio.

It had been in his room for the length of our stay, but he had thought it to be a sewing machine, and it was only when he attempted to sew a button on his weskit and pressed the switch that he made his important discovery. And it was this most simple of accidents that led to our being involved in a case that, while it earned us the plaudits of the New York police-officers,

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was to Homes one of his greatest failures. In my notes I find the affair listed as *The Adventure of the Animal Fare.*

We had been brought to the colonies from our comfortable quarters at 221-B Bagel Street in London by a most urgent appeal from Homes's old friend, Inspector Richard King of the New York bobbies. The Inspector had mentioned some problem of cigarette smuggling, but the details were unknown to us, nor were we better informed upon our arrival, as the Inspector was off on holiday. Rooms were at a premium at the moment because a circus was coming to town, but we were fortunate enough to find accommodations at Ill Manors, an old inn beside the local hospital, and it was there on the late afternoon of the day the Inspector was scheduled to return that Homes made his fateful discovery.

I was being served an early supper in the sitting-room of our suite when Homes burst into the room carrying this strange contraption. He brusquely pushed aside a plate of curried favour I had had to bribe the inn chef to prepare, set the box on the table in its stead, and glanced at me in triumph. Then, before either I or my youthful waiter could remonstrate with him for having moved the plate beyond my reach, he twisted a knob and the most frightful squeal issued from the box.

"Really, Homes," I said reprovingly. "An imprisoned cat? Beyond the cruelty of it, I consider it quite unsanitary to place animals on a table where someone is eating."

"No, no, Watney," said he impatiently, and sat down abruptly, drawing the box nearer him and adjusting the knob. "This is one of the newer inventions, known here as a 'radio,' I believe. I had heard of it, but I honestly did not believe it to be more than an idle rumour. Now, however, I am forced to reconsider."

"But, Homes," I asked curiously, "what does it do?"

"I am not quite sure," he replied cautiously, pinching his lip. "I have been listening to it and apparently it is able to pick up and transmit conversations of people without their knowledge."

"Without their knowledge, Homes?" I asked, scandalised.

"Certainly nobody would discuss a ring of dirt about his collar, or the incontinent condition of his digestive tract, if he knew someone was listening," said he dryly.

"True," I conceded. "Is that all you heard, Homes?"

"Well, I did hear some woman speaking of frozen steaks—she referred to them as white tournedos—but I paid scant attention." His eyes shone as he studied the invention before him. "Just

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think, Watney. Consider the limitless possibilities of this machine. To be able to listen to criminals as they plot their nefarious schemes, all without their knowledge! Let us try the box again."

He pushed several buttons and twisted the dial. Almost instantly there was a response. The tone of voice speaking was lugubrious, tinged with tragedy. Homes instantly leaned closer to the machine, listening intently, his brilliant mind ready to record and analyse every word.

"I was doing a bounce-around from Shakyside," the voice said dolefully, "four days on the boulevard. I was just blowing the doors off a pregnant roller skate when I see I'm also skipping the chicken coop, but it was too late then. A bear in plain wrapper is waiting on the grass, and now I'm on my way to the zoo."

"Tough," said a second voice sympathetically. "Well, threes on you."

"Threes and eights," said the tragic voice, and the small box fell silent.

Homes turned the switch and leaned back, his eyes glistening with excitement. "Did you hear that, Watney?"

"Of course," I said a bit indignantly. My hearing has always been excellent, as Homes knows full well. "But what does it mean, Homes?"

"It means this machine has far greater range than I had imagined," he replied thoughtfully. "What we have just heard is obviously in some foreign tongue."

My youthful waiter paused in his gathering of the dishes and allowed himself an indulgent chuckle.

"No, gentlemen," said he. "That is what is known as C.B. language and is quite American, I assure you. Those are merely two truck drivers conversing with each other. The first said that he was returning from California, four days on the highway. He was just passing a VW when he noticed he had inadvertently failed to notice a weigh-station. To his distress, a policeman in an unmarked car was lurking on the median strip and our driver is now following the policeman to the barracks. The second driver then commiserated with the first, after which they exchanged regards and fell silent."

Homes studied the youth thoughtfully for a moment, and then spoke. To my surprise he made no reference either to what we had heard on the radio, or to the young man's interpretation of it.

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"Tell me," said Homes in a conversational tone of voice, "your name is Eric, is it not?"

"Why, yes," said the young man, obviously surprised.

"And am I correct in assuming that you wait tables, not as a vocation, but in order to work your way through University?"

"That is true," the young man stammered, "although how you knew is a mystery to me."

Homes pressed on, his eyes now half closed, his fingers tented.

"Would I also be correct to assume that it is your intention to major in mathmatics?"

The young man turned pale. "That is also true, although how you could possibly know that is beyond me, as I had not made up my mind myself until just this morning. Until then I had hoped to be—"

"A veterinarian?" Homes interjected smoothly.

The look of pure terror in young Eric's eyes gave proof that Homes had again hit the mark. Without a backward glance the young waiter hastily shouldered his ladened tray and made his escape. Homes looked after him sympathetically.

"Poor misguided idealist," my friend murmured cryptically. "Still, the law is the law and since we are here under the aegis of an inspector of police, we can hardly allow it to be broken under our noses. Besides, how could we bear the burden of the unhappy children were we to do nothing?"

"Really, Homes!" I said, annoyed. "Where do children come into this? And how could you possibly have deduced all those facts about young Eric?"

"Later," replied Homes, but I was not to be put off.

"No, sir," said I. "I do not understand a bit of this! It is all gibberish to me, both what we heard on this—this radio object as well as the young man's explanation of it. I am aware of C. B. DeMille, but who is C. B. Language? What is a VW? And how does one pass it?"

Homes considered me sadly.

"I should have thought that after all these years you would have learned from my methods, Watney," said he. "Never complicate matters unnecessarily. VW is exactly what it appears to be—two adjoining letters in the alphabet. Doesn't that point you in the right direction?"

But before I could comment, he had tented his fingers again and fallen into a brown study. Several moments later he reached

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behind him for the one-inch scale map I had purchased to acquaint ourselves with the area, and fell to pondering it. A moment later he sat erect.

"Of course!" He looked up at me and chuckled, but there was little humour in it. "What a tissue of lies that young man fed us!"

"Homes!" I exclaimed reprovingly. "How can you doubt the word of an upstanding young man who would wait tables just to further his education!"

Homes smiled grimly.

"Surely you were not taken in, Watney?" said he. "His silly story of the colony of California being called Shakyside? Why would anyone call it that? Or his statement that the driver had inadvertently passed a way-station. Certainly after four days on the trip he must have been looking desperately for a way-station! No, no, Watney, it was all a fabrication."

"But for what purpose, Homes?"

His eyes narrowed. "To arrange a hijacking, of course, Watney!"

"But, Homes—!"

"Later," he said savagely and came to his feet, clutching the map. "Hurry, Watney! Arrange for a four-in-hand while I send a message for the Inspector to meet us." He paused as I started towards my room. "No, no, Watney! Not a cravat! A carriage!"

I shamefacedly descended the stairs and made the necessary arrangements, and moments later Homes joined me. Beneath his deerstalker he had concealed a dark-lantern, and a pistol peeped threateningly from his cape. Without the need for explanation he passed me the pistol, which I instantly hid beneath my shawl, and moments later we were in the carriage and Homes had given our jehu his directions. As we started off at a gallop, Homes fell back in his seat, turning to me.

"As we now have a few moments' time," said he with his usual insufferable air of superiority, "allow me to explain this simple affair to you. It was evident from the beginning that animals were involved, and that the young man Eric—whose name I deduced from the tag on his lapel—was doing his best to lead us away from this track. Listen to the many references: 'Chicken coop'; 'bear'; 'zoo.' And have we heard anything recently connected with animals?"

"No," I said.

Homes shook his head despairingly. "Watney, at times I do not know what to do with you! Why are we incarcerated at an old

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broken-down inn such as Ill Manors?"

Suddenly I saw the light. "The circus!" I cried. "They are coming to town! And they have animals!"

"Exactly," he said with a sigh, and brought his eyes down from the ceiling. "You may also remember one of the lorry motorists saying 'threes,' which undoubtedly referred to the number of rings in the circus. But the important words spoken were the words: 'blow the doors off.' The plot, then, became evident—an attempt to rescue the animals from the lorries in which they are being transported.

"Certainly this can only be misguided idealism. When one thinks of animals being freed to suffer the environment of places like Times Square when they could be happily entertaining children, one is forced to call such motives misguided. But to a person who feels so strongly about animals being caged, it was also evident that a career as a veterinarian would be unthinkable for that young man."

"True," I said, admiring, as always, my friend's impeccable logic. Suddenly I saw a problem. "But. Homes, where is this villainous scheme to be attempted? How can we know?"

"You are not paying attention, Watney," he said chidingly. "I told you that VW were merely two letters. Between these two letters and the Z of the final word Zoo, we find the letters X and Y. What do these letters mean to you?"

"Unknown quantities," I said, sure of my ground. My mind began to fairly explode. "And the two letters *before* VW are TU! The two unknown drivers are trade unionists!"

"Possibly," Homes said through clenched teeth, "but that has nothing to do with the problem. X and Y are the standard references for map co-ordinates, the X co-ordinate being the horizontal, or east-west co-ordinate, while the Y is the vertical, or the north-south co-ordinate. And locating the intersection of these co-ordinates on a standard one-inch map of New York, brings us *here*." His thin finger tapped the map in his hand. "This is where we are going!"

I leaned back, amazed as always at the ease with which Homes could bring clarity to a confused situation, although I would have been willing to wager that the two drivers we would shortly meet would have syndicate memberships in their possession when we searched them.

Moments later our driver tugged at his reins and drew in to the

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kerb, and we descended to find ourselves in a darkened alley. Night had fallen, and beyond the pale light cast by a flickering gas-lamp in the corner, we could hear the soft lapping of water against pilings, and smell the brackishness of the river. Homes slid a coin into our driver's hand, spoke a few words to him, and as the carriage faded into the night mist he drew me further into the shadows.

"Our cab will wait for us around the corner," said he in a subdued voice. "It would not do to advertise our presence." He dug his watch from his waistcoat pocket and consulted it by the light from the gas-lamp. "It will only be moments until they arrive," he said, and frowned darkly. "But where is the Inspector?"

"But how could you possibly know the time the attempt is to be made, Homes?" I asked.

"The 'threes and eights' mentioned by the first driver, Watney. They add up to elevens, which can only mean eleven minutes after eleven. As it is now nine minutes past that hour, they should be here shortly." He frowned again. "But where is the Inspector?"

Before I could assure him that I did not know, there was the sound of a lorry being driven slowly down the alley, and Homes drew me further back into the doorway. A moment later the lorry had cut its lights and drawn to a stop before a warehouse, after which the driver descended cautiously and began to fumble with the lock of the warehouse door.

"We cannot await the Inspector any longer," Homes whispered into my ear, and in the same motion he sprang from our cover and shone the light of the bull's-eye lantern full on the startled face of the driver. At the same moment I clapped the pistol to the man's head and minutes later we had him bound and at our mercy.

I wished to search him for his union membership card, but Homes would have none of it, and it was just as well, for no sooner had we regained the obscurity of the doorway when the second lorry arrived. Moments later we had the second driver bound as well, and Homes came to his feet and took a deep breath.

"And now to examine their cargo," he muttered, and clambered aboard the first lorry, pulling back the tarpaulin that concealed the contents. I waited as I heard him inside, but I was not prepared for the black look on his face when he emerged. A sec-

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ond later he had entered the rear of the second lorry, and if anything his scowl was intensified when he emerged.

"We are too late," he said heavily, and added harshly. "Murderers! And I thought they were merely misguided idealists, wishing only to rescue the animals!"

"They did not, Homes?" I asked, surprised.

"Quite the contrary," he said blackly. "They wished to steal them for cat or dog food!"

"No!" I exclaimed, shocked.

"Yes," he replied, and swept the tarpaulin away. In the light of the bull's-eye lantern I could see the truth of Homes's statement, for not only had they slaughtered the animals, but they had already packaged them! On the case before me I could see, clearly marked: *Camels*.

With no appettite for further investigation in a colony where such cruelties could be perpetrated, Homes and I returned to the inn and packed our gear, and later that day we set sail for England, not wishing to hear the weeping of the children when they learned the fate of the circus animals. And it was there, back in our quarters in Bagel Street, that we hard from the Inspector.

CONGRATULATIONS, read his wire. YOUR MAGNIFICENT EFFORTS HAVE LED TO THE SUCCESS WE ANTICIPATED. WHEN CAN WE EXPECT ANOTHER VISIT FROM YOU? WE ARE HAVING TROUBLE WITH ANIMAL THIEVES.

Homes shook his head sadly.

"These colonials!" said he. "They will never learn to speak our tongue properly. They clearly mean thieving animals, which is more in the line of a husbandry psychologist than in mine. A cable to the Inspector explaining this, if you will, Watney!"

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a *NEW* short story by

JOHN BALL

An unclassifiable story even for a genre as broad and diversified as the mystery . . . but any story that has an atmosphere of secrecy or enigma, a sense of the unexplained, to say nothing of suspense and surprise—surely such a story has its place in a mystery magazine . . . by the creator of "In the Heat of the Night" Virgil Tibbs whose next short-story exploit will appear in EQMM soon . . .

THE MAN WHO LIKED BASEBALL

by *JOHN BALL*

In the first day that could properly be called spring, little Robert Osborne Park reached out from the heart of the city to answer the invitation of the new season. Ignoring the fact that it was forever bounded by harsh concrete curbs and the poisoned dead world of asphalt pavement, the new season awakened the sap in the park's few trees and fed the roots on its little patches of tough Bermuda grass. The huge honeycombed buildings that stabbed the sky around it could not cut off all its share of sunshine, and the subways that roared underneath could not rob its few feet of soil of the right to make things grow.

In one corner of the small facility that was protected by a document filed somewhere in the depths of City Hall, a dozen or so street kids from the neighborhood had gathered to play baseball.

There was a diamond of sorts laid out and a wire-fence backstop separated the playing area from the heavy traffic intersection a few feet behind it. The field was small—it had to be, for the value of the real estate that comprised the park was so high that not a foot could be wasted. The ground was still very wet from the soaking rains of the previous week, but the assembled players ignored the near mud as they argued about the organization of the game.

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"Awright, awright!" the tallest and leanest yelled, and finally commanded attention. "Let him catch for both sides. He's got the mitt, ain't he?"

The kid with the catcher's mitt waved it in the air to convince the unbelievers.

"Ground rules," the shouter went on. "Three fouls on the third strike and you're out. If you lose us the ball, you get a new one."

The second edict hit hard. The ball was an ancient one that had long since lost its leather cover and had been rewound with black electrician's tape. It was the only ball; if it went into the street, it would have to be retrieved regardless of the dangers of traffic.

Finally the game began. As soon as it did, each player on the field dropped into professional stance and the undersized diamond became as important as the one in Yankee Stadium. The pitcher threw, the batter swung, and the ball was fouled to the side.

"Careful, Benny," the shouter called out.

Benny nodded that he had heard and twisted the bat in his hands. On the next pitch he hit a ground ball, another foul which skittered across the thin lumpy grass toward the concrete path that cut through the park. A man who was passing picked it up, lifted his right foot, and made a reasonably expert left-handed throw back to the playing field. The ball rolled directly to the pitcher's mound and stopped.

When no one thought to thank him, the shouter displayed his authority. "Nice peg," he called, making sure the others would hear.

With two strikes on him, Benny managed a scratch single down the third base line. As he pridefully took a completely safe lead off the piece of wood that served as first base, he saw that the man had walked over, stopped, and was now watching the game.

When the catcher missed the next pitch, that had been wide by a mile, Benny stole second. He was disappointed that no play was made to get him and that his success was by default.

The next batter swung awkwardly, as though he had never before had a bat in his hands. After two abortive tries to hit bad pitches, he popped up a foul. There was no player anywhere near the ball. The spectator could have caught it easily where he stood, but he stepped aside and let it drop. When the ball was officially dead, he picked it up and tossed it back to the shouter on the mound.

Being boss of the game, and shy several fielders, he made an

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enormous concession. "Wanna play?" he asked.

The man shook his head. "You play, I'll watch," he answered. Then he had an afterthought. "Don't you have a better ball?"

The shouter jerked his shoulders up to take offense, then let them fall. "It's last year's ball," he answered in a masterstroke of diplomacy. Since the guy had thrown the ball back twice, he was entitled to that much.

The man went away. He waited at the corner for the traffic light to change and then crossed the mercilessly pounded and worn asphalt. Half a block down he entered a store.

"National League or American League?" the clerk wanted to know.

"Make it four American League," the man answered. He was used to making decisions. He paid for the new baseballs and on the way back to the park he rubbed one of them up between his palms. The others bulged in his coat pockets.

He returned to where he had been standing close to the third base line just in time to capture another foul ball that had come knifing across the thin grass. He scooped it up skillfully and then performed a bit of sleight of hand. The ball he threw back was a virgin white one which landed precisely in the pitcher's glove.

The shouter stared at it in disbelief.

"Try that one," the man invited.

All the players had seen the white arc of the new ball. The game stopped dead while the shouter came over. "I don't get it," he said.

The man produced the other three baseballs, still in their cube boxes. "When you play baseball, you want to do it right. Do you come here often?"

"When we can get the field," Benny piped up.

"Then keep those balls and use them when you need them."

The boy who had been playing a combination of right and center field believed in nothing. "Are you some kind of a nut, or something?" he asked.

"I like baseball," the man answered him, "and I like to see it played properly."

He turned to the shouter who still hadn't made up his mind. "How are you going to learn control unless you have a properly balanced ball? When you go up for the big leagues, they're going to want to see you work the corners, low and close, but still in the strike zone."

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"Who are you?" the third baseman wanted to know.

"Shaddup." The shouter took full command. "Never mind who he is. Come on back and finish the inning. One out."

Obediently the players returned and with the bright new ball the quality of the game visibly improved. When the catcher trapped a pitch in the mud, the shouter wiped the ball clean on a corner of his shirt before he threw it again.

After the next out he called his players into a conference. "You know who that guy over there is?" he asked. "He's Rube, that's who." He let the impact of his superior knowledge sink in.

"Rube, who the hell is he?" The outfielder made it half a question, half a sneer.

The shouter held his voice down with a massive effort. "Rube Klatt, you fathead, what'd ya think!"

"That ain't Rube," the first baseman said, just to be obstinate.

The third baseman turned and stared at the man in wonder.

The catcher turned and looked at him too. "I think he is Rube. He threw left-handed, didn't he? And look at the balls he just give us—American League."

The kid who was the other outfielder cut in. "Who's Rube Klatt?" he demanded.

The shouter remembered that Pinky was new in the country—he still threw like a girl. "He's in the Hall of Fame, that's all. Greatest Texas League hitter of all time—that's a ball right over the infield just where nobody can get it, see? He hit almost four hundred three different years in the majors."

"Like Ty Cobb," Pinky, who learned fast, responded.

"Now you get it."

The catcher took up the account. "Last game of the season in Yankee Stadium. He was out with a broken finger. He came up as a pinch hitter with a cast on his hand and drove in two runs. Beat the Yankees five to three for the pennant."

"He ain't Rube," the right fielder sneered. "I'll tell you what he is, he's a damned cop. Ya think he bought those balls for us 'cause he loves us?"

The shouter was suddenly shaken. His thoughts jumped to his older brother who had been laying low ever since that job on West 37th Street. He had gotten out of there an eyelash before the cops had come charging in and he still wasn't sure they hadn't got him tagged. "He ain't a cop, he's Rube—I told ya!" He kept all doubt out of his voice as he asserted his authority. He didn't dare to

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show what he was thinking inside.

"He could be Rube *and* a cop," the third baseman said. "Jersey Joe Wolcott's a cop in Philly, ain't he?"

The right fielder refused to let that pass. "He ain't Rube, I know. He drank a lot."

"So my old man drinks—ya' wanna make something of it!" The shouter rammed the words down the outfielder's throat.

"Okay, okay, but he ain't Rube. He's the fuzz, if you ask me."

"Get him to hit," Benny suggested.

It was pure inspiration and the shouter knew it. He came off the low mound and walked with an automatic half swagger to where the man was still standing, waiting for the game to be resumed. "You're up," he said. "Benny, he wants you for a pinch hitter."

The man was dumfounded for a moment, then he understood. It was a gift in return for the baseballs—the only gift they could make.

"I might strike out," he suggested.

The shouter dismissed that thought without even considering it. "Come on," he said, and led the way. If the man *was* a cop, then he was automatically an enemy, but if he was Rube Klatt, then it would be glorious to be proved right. For that prize he was willing to risk a possible contact with disaster.

As he walked across the diamond to the batter's box, the man thought quickly about a small problem. If they really wanted him to swing, he should take his coat off. He didn't want to do that for several reasons: it would be a good dodge to get him into the game and then filch his wallet. Also he had an expensive wristwatch. But even more important, there was a badge in his coat pocket that he didn't want them to see. He knew, without being told, how they felt about cops and he was most anxious to keep that part of his identity secret.

He slipped the watch off and put it quietly into his left-hand trouser pocket.

The catcher eyed him for the telltale bulge of a policeman's gun. "You wanna take your coat off?" he asked, perhaps a bit too eagerly.

"I guess not," the man answered easily. He wondered for a moment if they had picked him as an easy mark because of his gift of the baseballs.

Then, barely audible, he heard the third baseman's voice,

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pitched very low in the expectation that he would not be heard. "It's Rube Klatt, I tell ya. My old man saw him when he got that hit with a broken finger."

Then the man understood. Memory surged back and he was once more in Yankee Stadium on that unforgettable day. The bases were full and a simple Texas Leaguer would do it. The pitcher had done his best and kept the ball low.

"He ain't Rube." The man caught the sneering tone in the other voice, the device of an adolescent who fights for recognition the impossible way.

"He's Rube and shaddup!" The pitcher made no real effort to keep his voice down; he was probably incapable of it.

The man turned and picked up the only available bat, hefting it for feel. When he turned around he faced a small audience made up of those who believed and those who did not. And he knew, instinctively, that the catcher had made him as a policeman. But something else overshadowed that harsh reality: the catcher squatted down, then looked up at him and said, "Golly!"

At that revealing moment the man fully understood the boy's overriding thrill—a Hall of Fame big leaguer playing in the same game with him. And despite the fear that had been in his eyes, the boy believed in him.

The man hitched up his sleeves with a motion of his shoulders and stepped into the batter's box. He took an odd left-handed stance, with the toe of his right foot pointed almost toward the mound. Everyone who knew anything about baseball would recognize the Rube Klatt stance and the way that he always shook his bat at the pitcher when the pressure was on.

"What's your name?" he called to the pitcher who was looking not at him, but at his feet.

"Frankie," the shouter answered.

"All right, Frankie, whenever you're ready."

Because the diamond was foreshortened to fit the limited space in Robert Osborne Park, even a modest hit would loom large on the reduced scale of the playing area. Traffic rushed by hardly 30 feet from the right-hand foul line, but it and all of the surrounding city were ignored. The man looked up, saw that there was a runner on third, and took a practise cut to get the feel of the bat. When he was ready, he pointed it straight toward Frankie and waved it slowly up and down.

"It's Rube, it's him!"

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The man heard it and realized that the first baseman had been transformed. He was suddenly wearing a pin-striped uniform and guarding the first sack at Yankee Stadium. Lou Gehrig's spot—he was standing in that immortal's very footprints.

Frankie wound up elaborately and pitched wide. The man at bat did not move.

"Good eye, Rube," the catcher said. There was awe in his voice as he spoke to one so great. He knew he was a cop, he was positive of it, but the fact that he was the legendary Rube Klatt wiped that consideration away. Even if he was trying to find out about Frankie's brother and that job on West 37th Street. Even if he had come to arrest Frankie. There was a cop once who had gone into a burning building and had brought out a black baby in his arms. A white cop, too.

The next pitch was low, but over. The man nodded to Frankie that it had been good. "Strike," he called on himself.

Frankie wiped the new ball on his shirt to preserve as much of the whiteness as he could and to get some of his own sweat off its surface. His mind was a whirl of confusion—cops, Yankee Stadium, the hitter with the broken finger, Rube Klatt himself—but he wouldn't take off his coat. Frankie defended himself by action: he took his position and threw.

It was a little wide, but shoulder high and well within reach. Leaning slightly forward, the man swung. He did not attempt to drive the ball, only to make the bat meet it evenly. When the impact came, his hands tingled joyfully with the sensation that no one who has ever played the game can ever forget.

The first baseman jumped, but the ball was over his head. It arced over the worn basepath and then fell in, just short of the outfielder who had refused to believe. The man ran easily to first while the player who had been on third came in to score.

By common consent the game for the moment was over. The Texas League hit had been placed perfectly, fitted to the dimensions of the reduced diamond.

"Thanks for the ups," the man said, and put his wristwatch back underneath his cuff.

"Will you be our coach?" Frankie asked, something close to pleading in his voice.

"I wish I could," the man answered, "but I don't get down this way very often. Hardly ever. I don't live around here."

"Ya work near here?" Benny asked, looking for a ray of hope.

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The man shook his head. "I'm retired," he admitted.

The outfielder didn't believe that. Cops didn't retire—they kept right on being cops.

"Of course, meathead." The pitcher let scorn sound in his voice as he spoke to the outfielder. "Unless he wants to come back as a manager some day."

The man deemed it a good time to retreat. He said a quick "So long" and walked away rapidly when attention switched to the still unconvinced outfielder who would grow up to hate the world.

He regained the concrete path and as he walked away he heard the last of the voices from the diamond. "Why didn't ya get him to sign the ball, ya dope!" He kept up a fast pace until he was well out of range, then slowed down while he examined his own soul.

He had never said that he was Rube Klatt—they had assumed that. He had deliberately made use of Rube's famous batting stance, and his mannerism of shaking his bat at the pitcher. He asked himself if he had wanted to bask in glory that was not rightfully his or if he simply had not wanted to disappoint some boys who had a strong need to believe. Boys who were not able to believe in something were on their way to trouble. He knew quite a lot about that.

When he reached the corner of the park where he confronted the city and its traffic, he stopped. He rested his foot on the marker that spelled out Robert Osborne Park while he brushed a little of the mud of the playing field off the bottom of his trouser cuffs. Then he used the drinking fountain that offered warm refreshment 24 hours a day.

His thirst slaked, he took a last look back at the little park and pulled out his cigarette case. The case was solid gold. When he opened it, he saw again the inscription, which read:

To Police Commissioner
Robert Osborne
from the grateful citizens of your city

He lit a cigarette, waited for the traffic light to change, then crossed to the taxi stand on the opposite corner.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 476th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . The prerogative of changing one's mind is supposed to be a feminine privilege. But men change their minds too. Here's the story of a man who did . . .

The author, Elizabeth McCoy, is a member of John Ball's "Alpha Group," a creative-writing class on the West Coast. She is "a graduate of the University of California, a long-time worker in information services of the United States missile and space programs, and a confirmed closet fiction writer." With this first publication Elizabeth McCoy has come out of the writing closet and into the light . . .

HENRY'S EIGHTH

by ELIZABETH McCOY

Almost immediately after his third failure to kill his eighth wife, Henry concluded that Ellen was indestructible, and—to his immense astonishment—he was glad of it.

He sat at the chrome-and-glass bar in the Marina apartment and swore softly to himself, then downed a neat slug of excellent brandy. Seawater from his smart sailing whites soaked into the rich upholstery of the bar stool and squelched in his Adidas deck shoes while he contemplated this incredible new development.

The house doctor came out of the bedroom and said he had given Ellen a mild sedative; she should sleep the clock around. She was a very lucky woman. So fortunate that those two young men should have arrived when they did to help with the rescue.

"Oh, God, yes," said Henry, meaning it from the bottom of his heart. "I'm not a strong swimmer at best, and I was so busy trying to get the boat under control after that lurch that it was seconds before I realized she'd gone over the side. And I just wasn't doing too well at finding her in the water until they got there. I—" He stopped, aware that he was talking too much.

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"Boating can be very tricky in this weather." The doctor's wistful eye was on the brandy. He accepted the proferred glass with satisfaction. "Have you done much sailing?"

"Not nearly enough." Henry was fervent. "And never again."

"Oh, now, you mustn't say that. These accidents will happen. You'd better take a long hot shower and put on some dry clothes yourself, or you'll be the patient. Don't hesitate to call me if Mrs. Murchison isn't feeling right up to par within a day or two. Good constitution, that girl."

Henry saw him out, then went and looked refelctively for a few moments at Ellen asleep, her damp hair straying over the pillow. Seen like that, reduced to fundamentals, she looked much younger than her 30-odd years, and at the same time disturbingly like the Ellen he had first seen on that train to Baltimore three years ago. Ah, that other Ellen, the prematurely faded relict of a domineering mother, wearing a brooch too ugly to be anything but real diamonds, and no makup, and scared to death of her first train ride alone.

He wandered into the bathroom, shed his clothes on the floor, and stepped into a shower with a control panel like that of a 747. The hot water pulsed out over him. He did some of his best thinking in showers. Probably something about getting the blood moving in the brain that stimulated his normally logical thought processes. Maybe he could sort out just what the hell was the matter with him now.

First of all, there was his absolutely inexplicable attitude toward those two young idiots who came churning out of nowhere to the rescue. He had actually pointed out to the blond one, while frantically gulping half of the Pacific himself, exactly where Ellen had gone down in the water. And the boy had dived there and dragged her up. Now what had made him point out the right place? Another minute or two of diving in wrong places and it would have been all over, even if they found her.

None of his projects had ever been more painstakingly set up, or promised handsomer returns, than Ellen. Of all the women he had ever married she was the only one who could leave him an estate to keep him in comfort for the rest of his life, even if some of the present plush was from trusts. And everything that she could she had neatly and gratefully willed to him.

All the others had been small-time. He had got a little inexpensive jewelry, some furniture and worthless clothes—and the

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insurance. Good lord, that first policy had been for only $5,000. It was all he could afford. He and Ellen had spent more than that in their first two weeks here at the Marina.

And the chances he had taken on some of them—for such small returns. It chilled him even now to think of the danger. He adjusted the shower mixture to a hotter spray. That mean little redhead, Jennie, who had got wise to the setup and played along, and then demanded all he had in his bank account—the one she knew about—and even his watch, to stop her from going to police. And the fiasco with Angela and that insurance investigator with the soft voice and the facial tic like a jovial wink. That whole thing had been a loss, even his clothes left behind with the threat of that watchdog on his heels. And the others—seven so far.

He turned the dials to a soft warm spray like summer rain, letting it patter down on the bald spot that he always combed the hair over so carefully.

For a while there, with one and another of them, he had just about got discouraged and given it up for good. Oh, those dreary little jobs when the pickings were scarce. Fitting tight shoes on fat females. As a short-order cook. The roofing con. Selling restaurants that silver polish he drank the sample of to prove how harmless it would be to their flatware. Peddling encyclopedias. Then Ellen on that train to Baltimore.

"Really," he thought, rubbing the lather deliciously around on his chest, "that was like a master violinist, down on his luck, finding a Stradivarius in the street."

Three years now to get it all in line, to get it foolproof. No chances with insurance this time. No need. There was nothing but money, hoarded by three generations of eccentrics, the unspent income from the trusts piling up into its own comfortable fortune. She was the last of that infertile line. No one to pry on her behalf into his fabricated background or to question his eager devotion that had won her gratitude.

He had had it made! Even when the auto accident and the fall downstairs misfired, there was no suspicion on anyone's part, least of all on Ellen's. Her mother had long ago, in her everlasting putdown of the girl, conditioned her to accept the fact that she was awkward and inept and that whatever mishaps overtook her were her own fault. This time, with the boat, it could have been a safe certainty. He had queered it himself. And, to top it all, he had this feeling of relief.

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Relief! Dammit, why?

He twisted the dial savagely so that the water pounded down on him, pushing him gasping against the back of the shower.

Suddenly, under that stinging torrent, the truth hit him—like a mystical revelation. He did not want to destroy Ellen because she was his creation, the only thing he had ever created in his life. And she was beautifully wrought. Out of that wilting, rabbity, dowdy, emotionally arrested little creature on the train he had, by his own charisma and taste and skill, like a master craftsman, made a subtly lovely woman, good to look at, poised, happy, self-confident, loving, and grateful—always glowingly grateful.

He turned off the shower and leaned against the wall, stunned. Had he never really intended to kill her, then, after the first few weeks, even though he had gone through the motions out of habit? It was like finding a stranger within himself. Now that the light had burst on him, he could see how it had happened. For safety's sake he had to let some time elapse after the marriage before concluding the matter. He had been shocked when he realized how little actual good the wealth stacked up by her mother and grandfather had ever done Ellen. Given her utterly pliant nature, the time, and all that money, it had become a challenge to remold her to the real potential of her fortune.

And he had worked at it—the clothes, the face, the figure, the charm of a naturally affectionate woman flowering in the warmth of attention and what she assumed to be love. The setting afforded every opportunity and every facility to polish the gem. And she had responded to it all with totally unspoiled gratitude and eagerness to please, to repay him for having given her a new being and a new life.

In a way he had been like that professor in the musical comedy based on Bernard Shaw's play that Ellen had enjoyed so much, the professor who had made a lady out of a flower girl.

Except, of course, he hadn't fallen in love with his creation. No. His strange behavior, now that he was beginning to understand it, was dictated by the soundest possible logic. Each of the others had represented a dangerous step on the way to some longed-for goal, some vague, easy way of life for which he hungered. Now he had reached that goal. It was as simple as that.

If he killed her would he have more money? No. And she left the handling of money, all the money, entirely to him—she never questioned his use of it.

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Would he have a more desirable lifestyle or companion in life? How could that be when he had fashioned her so completely to his own desires and standards? She was attractive. She lived to please him. She was breathing, glowing proof of his good taste, his success. With increased confidence she had even developed a fresh sexuality that stirred him as no woman ever had before. And she was at least four inches shorter than he.

Clearly he had found the end of the rainbow—and from sheer force of habit had almost thrown away the pot of gold.

He dried himself hastily, pulled on a terry robe, and went back into the bedroom. For just a moment a strange cold fear had tugged at him that she might be gone somehow, might have slipped quietly away in her sleep.

But she was there, curled on her side, her breath faintly moving a fine tendril of hair that had fallen across her cheek. He pulled the blanket up carefully over her bare shoulder and stood looking down at her. "What is it the kids say?" he thought. " 'This is the first day of the rest of my life.' It is. Oh, God, it is."

Such a flood of relief and well-being swept through him that he bent and kissed her gently, unmindful that there was no one there to see him.

"Henry?"

"Yes, sweet."

"Keep reading your paper and promise not to look around for two minutes."

"Darling, not *another* present?"

"Not really. Just—don't look yet! Now."

"It's the hybrid that Morris wouldn't part with. How in the world did you get it?"

"You wanted it. I talked him out of it."

"And paid plenty?"

"Not enough to matter if you want it. I don't know anything about money. That's your job. You're getting a very distinguished collection. Maybe we should get an assistant gardener to help out old Ames."

"Mouse, come here. You shouldn't spoil me like this."

"Ummm. I love to spoil you. You made me begin to live. I love you."

"Concentrate now—please, Henry! Do you want to go to Miami,

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Tahiti, Acapulco, that new place in Morocco where everyone wears bedsheets, or the lake?"

"Can't we just stay here and see the fall coloring before we close the house?"

"I wanted you to say that. You always say the right thing. No wonder that Stella Montrose is absolutely mad for you."

"She knows a good thing when she sees it."

"What an egotist you are! But so do I, darling. So do I."

"Open the door and then your eyes, and you will have a great surprise."

"Ellen, baby, it's beautiful. But the Mercedes isn't even a year old yet."

"But I could tell you liked Tony Harlowe's. And this is a prettier color than his, isn't it?"

"My God, yes."

"And it's a great occasion."

"What occasion? I forget."

"No, you don't. You never forget. Six years. I can feel a box in your pocket now. If I get a little closer—and just a little closer still and—"

"It's only a sprain, Henry. I hardly feel it with the foot up like this. Don't bark at the poor old doctor. He just isn't used to treating anything more complicated than hangovers."

"I want you to have X-rays. It was a bad fall. You could have gone all the way down and off the ledge."

"Love, don't fret. I'm just awkward, that's all. Even you couldn't make that over. I fall—have ever since I was little—down stairs and over curbings and off boats and over rocks. I'm always all right, darling. Henry? Darling, don't look like that. I'm all right I tell you."

"What would I do if something happened to you—if anything happened to you—now?"

"I see that Ames has moved those rose tubs onto the terrace at last."

"Not Ames, darling. His latest assistant. He's not very bright, but he is big—simply enormous. I told you I'd find some muscle power to help Ames if we could keep him a few more years before retirement."

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"What would I do without you, Mouse?"

"What *would* you do if anything happened to me, Henry?"

"Oh, probably get a good toupee and marry Stella Montrose or Pamela Grant or one of those dozens of women you're always telling me are frantic for me."

"Monster. I mean really. I would so much hate to go without having somehow expressed all I feel for you—the love and—and the gratitude."

"So very sober all of a sudden. You're talking as if Dr. Mason found something wrong today."

"Of course not, darling. Don't get so upset. He says the ankle is as good as new. He suggests I learn to pick up my feet when I walk."

"A very sound idea indeed. And also to pay attention at cards. Gin."

"You have just got to be cheating. This is the third game. . ."

"Darling, I have a surprise for you."

"Before I even get my coat off? Do I shut my eyes?"

"No, silly. It's on the terrace. That is—well, let me take your coat."

"Is it something my tie needs fixing for?"

"No. I'm only stalling for time really. I—well, you know I'm such a dolt about falling everywhere and having accidents, and—if anything should happen to me—the money—"

"Mouse, there's enough for us for two lifetimes. Now let's not talk about—"

"Yes. We have to. I want you to have everything I can give you. It would never be enough for what I feel. There, your tie's fine. Let's go. What it is—well, I mean I took out this absolutely huge life-insurance policy—and the company says it's usual to meet the beneficiary on such a large one and—Mr. Lorimer, this is my darling husband, Henry."

The slow turning of the man near the rose tree, and the hand extended.

"Mr.—ah, Murchison?" Softly, softly, and the tic like a jovial wink at a good joke shared.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 477th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Sports detective stories are not that common. There have been sports mysteries about baseball, football, basketball, archery, boating, prizefighting, cricket, fencing, fishing, golf, hunting, horseshoe pitching, horseracing, polo, skiing, swimming, tennis, tobogganning, track and field, and games like chess, poker and Ping-Pong, and such hobby-sports as coin, stamp, glass, and butterfly collecting—sounds like hundreds of them, but in the enormous field of the detective-crime-mystery short story they are still comparatively few; but to the best of our recollection we have never published an ice-hockey detective story, or read one. So here is what might be called a first first . . .

The author, Donald Chaikin, has lived all his nearly thirty years in Brooklyn. He was graduated from Brooklyn College in 1970 and has been writing ever since. To keep himself in typewriter ribbons and paper, he has worked as a high-school teacher and diesel mechanic. His interests include hiking and mountaineering, and, obviously, ice hockey which he "watches avidly and plays poorly." But here Mr. Chaikin scores his first goal . . .

HAVOC ON ICE

by DONALD CHAIKIN

"I still don't know how I let you talk me into giving up my card game for this," Lou Pegroni said to his partner, Detective Lieutenant Ed Fournier, as they moved with the crowd into the Belmont Civic Arena for the Belmont Blades first game of the professional hockey season.

Ed didn't answer. He was too busy letting the excitement of the moment bring back all his memories of walking into the Montreal

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Forum to watch the Montreal Canadiens. Ed Fournier was born in Montreal, and had spent almost 25 years watching the Canadiens—or *Les Habitants* as the French-Canadians called them—dominate every other team in hockey. Ed and his father, uncle, and cousin had gone to see almost every Canadien home game. When a group of Belmont businessmen formed a corporation and bought their way into the National Hockey League, Ed was overjoyed.

Lou had a dimmer view of the city's latest professional sports team. "Just what we need," he'd said at the time, "a bunch of guys skating into each other and hitting each other with sticks. We get enough of that on the streets."

"That's a typical policeman's attitude," Ed had replied. "At least go see a game with me and *then* condemn it, eh?"

Ed Fournier tried for three years to get his partner to accompany him to a Blades game, and now he had finally succeeded.

As the two detectives worked their way toward the stands, Lou stopped to buy a Blades banner. "Well," he commented, rolling up the felt triangle, "at least now I can prove to Rose that I wasn't out losing the mortgage payment tonight."

Ed grinned, forgetting for the moment the coming twelve-day shift he'd arranged for himself so he'd be able to see this game. *That* was immaterial. For, like so many other Canadians, Ed didn't consider himself just a hockey fan: he thought of himself as a fanatic. Ed was certainly far more knowledgeable than the average Belmont fan. He prided himself on the way he saw things in a game that most people weren't even aware of. Whenever he watched on television, he flipped off the sound. The announcer's comments were insulting to someone who really knew the game.

"Come on," Ed said, "I don't want to miss the warmups."

"Warmups?" Lou answered, glancing in the direction of the bar. "If it's that cold in there, I'll wait here."

Ed laughed as they climbed the stairs. He explained to Lou that he could fairly well predict the outcome of the game by watching the players as they went through the pregame drills. And as he often pointed out, the key person to watch was the goaltender, the man with the big stick, gloves, elephant-like leg pads, and ominous mask who was a team's last line of defense. The goaltender either stopped the puck by catching, kicking, batting, or throwing his body in front of it, or he allowed the goal. And as every fan

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knew, the goaltender who allowed too many goals was soon out of a job.

Ed had been overjoyed when, soon after the Blades were formed, the management announced that for a large outlay of cash and future draft choices, they had been able to acquire Jean-Louis Vembé. Vembé was one of the premier goalies in the league, and for many years had been the nemesis of Ed's Canadiens, when he had guarded the goal for the rival Toronto Maple Leafs. Jean-Louis Vembé was an imposing man, standing six foot three without ice skates. His face was a long plastic mask emblazoned with a big maple leaf that had a skull and crossbones in the center. At 37, though, he was thought by some critics to be getting too old.

Perhaps Vembé's reflexes *had* slowed a fraction. Perhaps his vision *wasn't* as sharp as it used to be. But he had compensated by becoming a wiser, craftier player. With Vembé between the pipes the Blades finished third in their division and had a chance at the Stanley Cup playoffs—a remarkable feat for a new team in its first year. Even Ed Fournier, who once hated Vembé as much as any sports fan ever hated an athlete, now had a large four-color poster of him hanging next to his desk in the squad room. And Ed was very interested to see how the great goaltender looked tonight for the first game of the new season.

"Good year coming, eh, Lieutenant?" the usher said, as he led the detectives to their seats.

"I hope so, Mike. Depends on that rookie with the big slap shot. And of course good old Jean-Louis, eh?"

"They both look good to me," the usher said, pocketing his tip.

Ed was always excited at the opening of the hockey season, almost goose-pimply. The sight of the center of the arena in the glare of the white rink with the huge electronic scoreboard hanging over the middle of it, and the players in their bright uniforms skating around, batting the puck at each other and shooting it at their own goaltender, thrilled him. He loved to listen to the loud cracks and thunks as the puck raced and flew around the rink and to the unmistakable sound of skates scraping over the ice. Ed's seats were behind the Blades bench and halfway up the stands. From there he had a commanding view of the action, yet he was close enough to Jean-Louis Vembé's goal net to clearly see the goalie's superb play.

"Where do they rent the sunglasses?" Lou asked, squinting at

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the rink. Ed smiled; his eyes quickly got used to the brightness as he watched the Blades warming up their backup goaltender while Vembé skated around the rink, loosening up. Vembé looked the same as Ed remembered him from last spring, his golden number 1 on the back of the jersey that covered so much protective equipment that he looked monstrously fat. Ed could see though, as the goaltender skated effortlessly by, that he wasn't at all fat. Lou also watched Vembé skate around the rink, easily stretching his long legs, even with their foot-wide, thigh-high pads.

When Vembé skated into the goal crease in front of the net and took the shots from his teammates, Ed watched him kick, flail, and throw himself around, stopping pucks coming from every direction.

"Told you he looks good," Mike, the usher, said, stopping again at Ed's seat.

"Hmm," Ed nodded, then pushed his sandy hair back out of his eyes, "except it looks like he can't stretch the way he used to. Watch the way he tries to get his glove down for those low shots."

"I don't know, Lieutenant," Mike said, trying to see what Ed was showing him. "He looks better'n ever to me."

"Me too," Lou said, shrugging, not really appreciating what his partner was saying.

"I hope so," Ed said. He decided to watch the goaltender carefully. Maybe age was finally catching up with the great Jean-Louis Vembé. Or maybe Ed Fournier was being too critical on the first day of the season. The players left the ice, throwing the pucks into the stands as they did, giving souvenirs to the lucky fans who could catch them, and then Zamboni lumbered out to clean the ice for the game. Fascinated, Lou Pegroni marveled as the color of the ice changed when the machine moved over it.

Ed took the fifteen-minute break to survey the people in the stands, half with a trained policeman's eye, half with a bachelor's eye. He was proud that he had managed to remain unmarried, and at the age of 34, with his boyishly mod good looks and trim physique, and with Lou's wife, Rose, constantly matchmaking for him, it wasn't an easy feat, even with the burden of being a homicide detective.

The officials and players returned to the ice and lined up on their respective blue lines while the Canadian national anthem was played in honor of the visiting Vancouver Canuck team. Ed Fournier stood silent as he listened to an abbreviated version of

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his national anthem. Then, without a pause, *The Star-Spangled Banner* was played, and before it was three-quarters through, the fans were cheering. The noise in the arena lowered to a din as the teams faced off at center ice and the referee dropped the puck to start the game.

The Canucks immediately took charge and started skating around the Blades goal, getting off four quick shots, all of which Vembé had to be quick to stop. He was, and a chant of "Jean-Lou, Jean-Lou" went up in the arena, followed by fifteen-thousand voices sighing relief as the Blades finally gained control of the puck and moved it to the other end of the ice. The relief was short-lived, though, as one of the Blades missed a pass and the puck ended up on the stick of a fast-skating Vancouver player who rushed toward the Blades goal.

Ed watched as the lone Canuck skated past the center red line and the Blades blue line, and moving full speed, his stick back up behind him, wound up and blasted a tremendous slap shot toward Vembé. The puck left the player's stick and headed straight for the goalie's chest. No one saw it hit him, though, because just as the puck reached Vembé there was an unearthly explosion.

The explosion blew a twenty-foot wide hole in the ice where Vembé had stood, blew the goal net off its stanchions, twisted its metal frame into a meaningless shape, and blasted Jean-Louis Vembé into tiny pieces.

Before the smoke, dust, and raining ice had settled, the arena was a scene of bedlam, as people, fearing another explosion, shoved wildly for the exits. The players were skating around in bewilderment, some of them peering at the edge of the crater where Jean-Louis Vembé had been. The Canuck player who had taken the last shot stood still, in shock, his stick on the ice in front of him. Detectives Fournier and Pegroni, their badges hastily pinned to their jacket fronts, were running down the stairs toward the ice, trying to help the security staff forestall a riot.

Ed corralled both teams' coaches, ordered them to put their teams in their respective dressing rooms, and told the security men to guard the locked doors. He instructed the guards that whatever remained of the goalie and his equipment was not to be touched. Lou was fighting his way to the broadcaster's booth and the cameras that were still running, catching the footage for the eleven o'clock news. "We'll want those films!" he shouted, waving his badge. . .

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"I told you that's an awful rough game," Lou Pegroni said to his younger partner, Ed Fournier, as he mixed his coffee in the squad room. "Rough enough to blast your hero to kingdom come." He shook his head and said, "And you want the P.A.L. to sponsor a youth hockey team? Sheesh!"

Ed sighed, put down his mug of tea, glanced at his poster of Jean-Louis Vembé, and then turning to the sergeant who had just walked into the room, said, "Are those films ready yet?"

"Well, sir," the sergeant said, "the visiting team's television station and our cable TV were taking video tapes, but the team itself was making films, and they're not ready yet, only the tapes."

"Okay," Ed said, "let's look at them. Television cameras usually just follow the puck carrier, but let's see what they've got." Ed and Lou sat down in front of the closed-circuit television set.

The tape of the Vancouver television station was what Ed thought it would be—action around the puck, showing the goaltender only when he was making those first saves. The two detectives carefully watched the last sequence as the camera followed the puck after it left the player's stick. But the puck was hit harder and faster than the camera could follow, and when the camera caught up with it, Jean-Louis was already gone.

"Cut it!" Ed shouted, turning away from the small screen. Being a detective didn't prepare a man for watching one of his lifelong heroes explode in slow motion. "Let's see our version," he said, "and send that one to the lab. Maybe they can see where the bomb came from."

The tape of the Belmont TV station showed the same sequence, only from a different angle, but it revealed no more of what really happened.

"That's it?" Lou asked, reaching for a fresh cigar. "It certainly isn't much. I don't suppose anyone who was there saw any more than we did."

"Less, I'm sure," Ed replied. "But the team's films should have more detail. Skippy Boulton is the type of coach who uses a lot of films. Let's talk to him."

"Yep," the coach said from behind the metal desk that seemed to dwarf him, "we've got films of that game. Matter of fact, we should have quite a few films. You know, see who's doing what wrong, and so on."

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Skippy Boulton had once been a feared and respected hockey defenseman, but since retiring seven years before he'd been coaching various teams in the league. The owners of the Blades, after careful consideration, had chosen Skippy to be their coach and general manager, giving him complete control of the team. He was small by modern standards of six foot, two-hundred-pound hockey players, and his balding head no longer had the blond crewcut that had been his trademark throughout his playing days. He still kept himself in playing shape, though. He often told reporters he wouldn't have his players go through any drills he couldn't do himself.

He half smiled, showing the false teeth he'd worn most of his life, and shrugged, "I don't know if my films will help you though. They only show my players." He pushed a manila folder across the top of his desk to Ed and added, "I almost forgot," as he gestured to a duffel bag that was propped against the wall under his collection of trophies and photographs. "This here is everything we've got of Jean-Louis—maybe there's something there for you." The coach looked at the folder as Ed picked it up, and shaking his bald head, said, "Not much, is it?"

Ed opened the folder and started thumbing through the papers. "Not much."

"He *was* blown into little pieces," Lou added, as he poked through the duffel bag.

Skippy Boulton rubbed his face, not seeming to mind the collection of scars he'd accumulated over the years, and said, "Who'd want to kill Jean-Louis Vembé? I mean for real. Heck, I know a lot of players who said they'd like to. *I* must've said it a few times myself when I was playing against him." Lou Pegroni looked at him, raising his eyebrows. "Aw, but that was just talk—"

Ed Fournier interrupted, "I see only this contract, which expired in July. Where's the new one?"

Boulton looked up at the lieutenant, scratched what little hair he had left on his scalp, and said, "Oh, he didn't have one yet. Guess he won't need one now."

"Didn't sign one yet?" Lou asked, walking to the desk wearing a goalie's glove.

"No," the coach replied. "Jean-Louis was asking for more money. He said he wanted some security. And I thought he was worth it to the team. I told the owners that, but they weren't sure. He was getting a little old, so they were waiting for the full

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medical reports before offering him a new contract."

"And how'd Jean-Louis feel about that?" Ed asked.

"He couldn't care less," the coach said, cracking his knuckles and watching Lou try to hold a cigar with a goalie's glove. "He said he felt great and wouldn't mind a thorough physical."

"And what happened?" Lou asked, dropping his cigar on the coach's desk and shaking his hand free of the big mitt.

"Doc McKinney had him in the hospital for two days taking all kinds of tests. I just got the results, and they should be in there, but I didn't get a chance to look at them yet. Been too busy trying to—" He shook his head and sighed, "You know."

"Well, we'll go through this," Lieutenant Fournier said, using the folder to gesture at the duffel bag, "and talk to the doctor. Meantime, Coach, guess you'd better get the team ready for the game against Boston, eh?"

"Well, Doctor, what does all this mean, in language that *we* can understand?" Ed said, trying to make sense out of the pages of charts and X-rays that were spread over Dr. McKinney's desk.

"Basically, what it means, Lieutenant," the doctor said slowly, leaning forward in his armchair, and pointing to a group of X-rays that had circles and arrows drawn on them, "is that, despite the fact that Jean-Louis told me he was feeling fine, he was in fact developing a serious case of rheumatoid arthritis."

"You don't have to know much about the game," Lou said, "to know that a goaltender with arthritis is just not cool."

"Did Jean-Louis know this?" Ed asked, looking down again at the strange pictures on the desk.

"Oh, yes," the doctor answered. "He'd been complaining to me every once in a while about pains, and I had my suspicions. But he was playing fine, and I knew he'd be getting the precontractual examination, so I waited to see all the test results before making my diagnosis. No, Jean-Louis was not surprised."

"Do the owners know about it?" Lou asked.

"Not yet," the doctor said, checking some papers on his desk. "The test results and X-rays came through just a few days ago, and when I went through them I drew up a preliminary report and sent it off to the coach. The complete report for the owners would have been mailed today or tomorrow."

"Let's look at those films from the coach, Lou. They should be

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ready by now," Ed said as they drove from the hospital. "Maybe they'll show *something*."

"Aren't you sick of seeing that game yet?" Lou said, "You know how it ends."

Ed watched the team's film carefully, especially the one that focused on the goaltender. Vembé was shown clearly as he skated out of his crease to block the last shot, and the camera stayed on him as the puck hit him squarely in the middle of his Blades emblem on his chest, followed instantly by the explosion. "Hold it! Run it back again," Ed called out in the darkened room. "Now watch. That's the only shot that hit him in the chest."

The detectives saw the entire film again, including the warmup drills. They watched intently as the goalie made each save, either with his glove, stick, or legs, but none with his chest.

"The lab says the same thing, Ed," Lou announced, turning on the room lights and handing over the laboratory reports. "From what they could scrape up, they said Vembé had the explosive on his chest, probably right in his padding, and the detonator was right there too, or in his jersey."

"Couldn't be the puck," Ed mused. "It was the only puck used in the game till then." Ed poured hot water into the mug on his desk and said, "Somebody must have switched his equipment before the game, but how?" Ed Fournier shook his head and dropped a fresh tea bag into his cup. "Goalies are a suspicious lot, and it's pretty hard to get at their equipment. And Jean-Louis was even tougher about it."

"Maybe he blew himself up," Lou said holding up the chest protector from the duffel bag. "Depressed about that medical report."

Ed Fournier leaned his chair back on its stand and pursed his lips. "Could be," he said, "but Jean-Louis was such a steady kind of family man." He looked up wistfully at the poster by his desk. He sipped his tea and stared intently at the picture of the goaltender. Lou watched him and refilled his own coffee cup. Then Ed sat upright. He grabbed the telephone and started making calls. He went to the duffel bag and rummaged through the equipment, muttering to himself. Lou put another cigar in his mouth and watched silently. He'd seen his partner go through this before.

The squad room of the Belmont police department was turned into a sports theater, as Ed Fournier and Lou Pegroni watched

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hockey game after hockey game, all filmed by the Belmont Blades. Police officers and detectives spent their free time watching the films, trying to pick up pointers on the sport as Ed gave a running commentary on all the Blades games from the last season, as well as some of the games of their minor-league farm team.

After watching the same two games three times each, and then again seeing Vembé's last game, Ed stood up, stretched, turned the room lights on, and said, "Okay, put out an APB for Jean-Louis Vembé. Better contact the R.C.M.P. too."

A general cry of "What?" went up in the room as the startled policemen rubbed their eyes, getting used to the light.

"Vembé?" Lou said, taking the wet cigar from his mouth.

Ed Fournier nodded and brewed some more tea. "Yes, Vembé," he said. "That was Marc Bouchard, the young goaltender from the farm team, who was killed. I should've been tipped off during the warmups. Jean-Louis never moved his glove that way. Bouchard was a good young player who was as big as Vembé and patterned his style after him, but he couldn't handle his glove like Jean-Louis. The films show it all right. That was Bouchard playing in the opener."

"But why?" Lou asked. "Why would Bouchard play like that, with nobody knowing? And why would Vembé blow him up?"

"Maybe he was afraid of the competition?" a sergeant said. "Afraid the young guy was after his job?"

Ed smiled and shook his head. "No, Jean-Louis was not afraid of the competition so much as he was afraid of early retirement. He knew he was close to being through, and if his contract was renewed at all, he realized it wouldn't be worth much. Certainly he wouldn't get the security that Skippy Boulton said he wanted. But he had a good deal of life insurance, eh, and he realized that he was worth more dead than alive. He must have contacted Bouchard in Dearborn and offered him the opportunity of a lifetime—to wear his equipment, star in the season opener, and then, at the end of the game, reveal himself."

"I don't get it," Lou said. "Didn't anybody miss Bouchard in Dearborn? And didn't *anybody* notice the difference in style?"

Ed smiled, "Young goaltenders these days are often a little, well, high-strung, and when Bouchard turned up missing, nobody was surprised. He'd done it before and his coach had fined him, but that's all. And since he was as big as Jean-Louis, styled him-

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self after him, and the fact that Jean-Louis never took that mask off—well, it was hard to tell the difference. He just wasn't as good a goaltender."

Lou shook his head, "You mean Coach Boulton couldn't tell?"

Ed looked at him with a hurt expression, "Lou, do you really think Skippy Boulton knows more about hockey than me?" Lou could see that his partner was serious. "Wait until he sees all these films together, then he'll agree."

Skippy Boulton did agree. But he didn't believe it, not until he learned that Jean-Louis had been steadily increasing his life insurance over the last two years, and now was worth a half million dollars, dead. And when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police went to the Vembé farm in northern Ontario, they found the great Jean-Louis Vembé, alive, well, and in one piece, and complaining about his arthritis.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

ANTHONY BLOOMFIELD

He didn't come back to his hometown in fifteen years. Much of the town had changed, of course, but some things never change. Pub crawling was the same, and Henry Butterworth was the same old Henry . . .

JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS

by ANTHONY BLOOMFIELD

Fifteen years I hadn't been back, knocking sixteen. They'd rebuilt the railway station. The centre I could scarcely recognize, it was all a pedestrian district now. From the taxi I looked down Castlegate, where The Black Swan used to be, and there was just this arcade of fancy shops.

I'd been booked in a hotel out beyond the Botanic Gardens, just off a new road. Standard modern sort of place, they're all alike, anonymous.

A sandwich and a pint, that did me for lunch. Then I got another taxi to the plant. It was in an industrial area, where the workmen's homes used to be.

It could have been a sticky session. After all, I'd come down to tell them it wasn't good enough, all these delays, they better sort themselves out. But he was sensible about it, the works manager, didn't try to shuffle the responsibility. And he had his problems too: the papers he showed me—well, I had to admit our Head Office wasn't altogether blameless. He asked me out to dinner.

I went back to the hotel, had a shower, and changed my shirt. Before I went out I phoned Mave at home. She put the kids on. Gary was in a hurry to get back to the telly, but Fiona rambled away . . . I miss you, Daddy . . . What are you going to bring me back, Daddy? She'd have gone on all night if Mave had let her. I told Mave I couldn't promise, but I'd try to get back late tomorrow.

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Be good, she said. If you can't be good be careful. You know me, I said, Old Faithful. She went ha-ha, but she knew I meant it.

We had dinner at the Royal, of course. It had been toned up since my day, not that in those days I was what you might call an habitué. After a couple of drinks in the cocktail bar I ordered lobster bisque and *filet de boeuf Stroganoff*. We had a bottle of Beaujolais with it, vintage.

He was quite a pleasant chap, the works manager. Not local. When I told him I'd been born and raised here, he asked me if I ever regretted having left. Frankly no, I told him, of course the place has changed.

He suggested we go on to a club. I knew what that meant, strippers and gambling. That's not my scene at all. So then he insisted on driving me back, and out of courtesy I took him to the bar for a couple of brandies.

It might have been the brandies, but when I got to my room I wasn't a bit sleepy. I switched on the telly, but there was something wrong with the picture and it was too late to make a fuss. I hadn't got a paper. There was a Bible, of course, or the phone books.

This plant manager, when I told him I'd lived here till I was close on 30, he'd asked me if I still had any friends in the town. Any old flames—wink-wink, nudge-nudge. I told him—it was true—I'd lost touch. I didn't mention Henry.

To a certain degree I suppose Henry had been in a corner of my mind, so to speak, ever since I got here. Ever since this trip was fixed up, for that matter. Now, for want of anything better, I got out the phone book. There was one Henry Butterworth and two H. G. Butterworths.

After I'd left we'd corresponded for a time, then sent Christmas cards for a few years, but none of these addresses rang a bell. Of course, for all I knew, he might have left the district, too.

Without really thinking, I dialed the Henry Butterworth number. He turned out to be a retired schoolmaster. I apologized and rang off. Then I started to dial one of the others, but I put back the receiver without completing the number. I suddenly wondered: do I really want to speak to Henry? Do I want to see him? So much water under the bridge, what would we have in common any more?

I'm not used to a big meal at night; because of the kids we normally have high tea. That's probably why, when I got into bed

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and put out the light, my brain was still hyperactive. I kept remembering the old days, however hard I tried to alter the direction of my thoughts.

When I got to sleep at last I had these horrible dreams. Something terrible kept happening to Fiona, over and over. It was a bit like watching the telly: I was detached, I couldn't influence the course of events, and I didn't feel very much. Except at the end of each episode, when it happened, an empty sensation as Fiona seemed to disintegrate before my eyes. Henry didn't appear in the dreams, as a participant I mean, but when I woke up I had this powerful impression of him, as if he'd been a kind of invisible presence throughout.

Next day at the plant things didn't go so well. The works manager, he seemed to be presuming on the strength of our social evening. I had to pull rank. Anyway, came four o'clock it became clear I'd need another day. I rang the hotel, then I rang home to tell Mave, but she wasn't in. She'd be fetching Gary from school, I supposed.

I think the manager expected me to reciprocate his hospitality, but one night out, that was enough for me. Back at the hotel I'd got the same room. I didn't bother to change clothes, I might go to the bar for a beer, then I'd have supper sent up.

I rang home again, and I couldn't understand it at first, there was no answer. Mave was always home at this time, so I had a little panic. Then I remembered she'd said, since I'd be away, she'd take the kids to see her mother. It was funny I hadn't remembered her telling me. I thought of phoning her mother's, but they were probably on their way back by now.

I dialed the desk to tell them about the TV. They said the engineer had gone off duty, but they'd try to find someone to fix it.

I didn't particularly feel like a drink just yet. They hadn't sounded very hopeful about the TV. The room, its impersonality, suddenly depressed me. On an impulse I got out the directory and dialed the number I'd started to dial the night before.

"Hullo, Henry," I said when he answered. I recognized his voice straight off. "Long time no see."

"Curly!" he said. "That's Curly," using the nickname no one had used for 15 years. "Where are you?"

I told him. I told him what I was doing here.

We only spoke for a couple of minutes. He took it for granted,

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since I was in town, that we were going to meet. He lived on the outskirts now, but he could be here in half an hour.

"All right," I said. "Where?"

"The Mucky Duck, of course. Where else?"

"The Mucky Duck?" I repeated.

"The Black Swan, Curly. Surely you remember."

I remembered. I also remembered when I'd passed in the taxi that it had disappeared.

"No," said Henry, "it's still there. You'll find it. It's changed of course, but it's still there."

The Mucky Duck had certainly changed. It used to be a dingy, smoky tavern, not rowdy—not often—but always busy, with a rough disreputable clientele. Now it was colored lights, carpets, and piped music, and a few couples on their way to the pictures. All they'd kept was the name.

Henry had changed, too. And yet, somehow, he hadn't—not in the way the Mucky Duck had. He looked older, naturally. His hair was receding, and he was wearing glasses which he hadn't before. But he had the same way of speaking, even to the same expressions, and the same mannerisms I remembered. He was the same old Henry. After a couple of drinks the 15 years faded away. It was just like the old days. In the old days we always used to start in The Mucky Duck.

"Right then," said Henry. We'd downed our second pints. "Onward Christian soldiers."

That's what he always used to say. Outside it was just growing dark. "Where are we heading?" I asked.

He looked at me quizzically. "Where did we always go?"

He meant The Markets. "Hasn't it all been flattened?" I said.

"Not entirely," said Henry. "You'll still recognize the old stamping grounds."

We walked through the center, past the Law Courts and the Town Hall. It was all dead as mutton. Back of Woolworth's we dropped into another pub to sustain ourselves on the way. It was part of the pattern, the old pattern.

Like any old friends meeting after all that while, we brought each other up to date. I told Henry about my job, and about Mave and Gary and Fiona. Henry had never married. He was still working for the same printing company, a little higher up the ladder now, that's all.

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I wanted to ask him if he had any regrets about not having a family, about not having moved on. But I didn't, I suppose I thought it might have sounded patronizing. As it was, everything was easy between us, unembarrassed.

Opposite the castle neither of us had to say anything, we crossed the road to go into The Hole in the Wall. It was almost empty, but then it never had been a very popular pub, for some reason. It was just the first you came to on the edge of The Markets. From there we went on to The Fox and Goose. It was Scotches by now, that was the old pattern too.

The Markets, between the castle and the canal, is the oldest part of the city. Narrow streets and alleys and stone steps, with a pub on almost every corner. It was because it was so ancient, I suppose, they hadn't pulled it all down, there'd be preservation orders. Most of the slummy tenements were gone though, and quite a few of the pubs were boarded up. "You still come down here much?" I asked Henry.

"From time to time," he said. "Not so often as we used to. It's not the same fun on your own."

In The Nag's Head I remembered I hadn't phoned Mave. There was a pay phone by the Gents, but there must have been something wrong with it, I couldn't get through. The Nag's Head is in the heart of The Markets. It's a singing pub, and it was pretty lively. "Just like the old days," said Henry.

"It's just like the old days, eh, Curly?" he said again, taking my arm as we crossed Watergate. "Had some times, didn't we, the two of us, in The Markets in the old days."

"Fifteen years ago," I said.

"That's right," said Henry. "Of course, times have changed."

We were heading for The Volunteer, it was taken for granted. That's where we always ended up, at The Volunteer. "And we're fifteen years older," said Henry. "With age one becomes more discreet." He pressed my arm.

I didn't answer him. I knew what he was getting at, of course, but there was no reason to talk about it. Some things are better left unspoken.

Henry seemed to sense my feelings: he started asking me about Gary and Fiona, my plans for their education, and so on. He sounded genuinely interested.

We came to the square, just up from the canal. Even in the old days this part had been "redeveloped." The Volunteer stood on the

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far corner, just where it used to be, a barn of a place, a Victorian gin palace. Across the square was the Palais de Danse. I remembered when they'd opened it, in the fifties. It was a big success. Now, though, something was wrong, there were no lights on. Then I read the poster over the doors, advertising a used-car auction.

Henry had followed my gaze. "The Palais closed five or six years back," he said. "They're going to pull it down and build a multistory carpark." We started across the square. "There's a disco down the street, that's where the kids go nowadays."

The Volunteer hadn't changed much inside. It was my round, I got doubles again. I'd been mixing them on an empty stomach, but I was still *compos mentis*. All the kids from the disco, of course they were dressed differently and had different hair styles and makeup and so on, but it was just the same as when they used to come in from the Palais. I felt confused, it was so much the same. The jukebox was deafening. There was suddenly a fresh influx, and four girls came and sat at a table close to where we stood.

"What's that?" I couldn't hear what Henry was saying to me. I was looking at the girls at the table.

"I said," Henry said, "how many was it altogether?"

"How many what?" They were real slags, the four girls, plain as old boots. Otherwise, of course, they'd have collected some boys by now.

"Was it six or seven, Curly?"

"It was six," I said. "You can't count the other one, that was an accident."

"Right," said Henry. "Call that one an accident, then it was six, I agree. It was six we did, the two of us." He turned away from me and shouted to the barman. It was getting near to closing time and they were frantically busy.

When Henry got the drinks he gave me both glasses to hold and pushed his way through the pack to the Gents. I moved away from the bar to a less hectic spot and put the glasses on a ledge. Some things are best left unspoken. It was the drink that had loosened my tongue. The drink and the atmosphere, the sense, so to speak, of *déjà vu*. But I blamed Henry for bringing up the subject.

He came back from the Gents. Where we were standing now, we were in line with the door. Some people were leaving, others

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pushing in for a last drink. "It must be, let's think, best part of a year since I was down here last," Henry said. "It's not the same fun on your own."

I seemed to recall he'd said that before, but I couldn't be certain. Truth to tell, the drink was getting to me finally. I'm not used to it, we don't drink at home unless we're entertaining. And Mave doesn't care for pubs. I remembered I hadn't phoned Mave. I didn't believe she'd be seriously worried. I hadn't said I'd definitely be back tonight. All the same, it depressed me not having spoken to her. When I'm away I always try to phone her once a day. Henry nudged me. "See what I see," he said.

It didn't register straight off. I looked at Henry, blinking there behind his glasses. The thing about Henry—he hadn't really changed—he looked so inoffensive, so negligible. He jerked his head toward the door.

Couldn't have been more than 14 or 15, and she showed it, they'd never have served her at the bar. She stood just inside the door, peering through the crowd. She was wearing narrow slacks and a white blouse. There was almost nothing of her, like a reed.

"Target for tonight," Henry said, and I laughed. It used to be another of his catch-phrases, like "Onward Christian soldiers." I didn't like it, but I laughed. After a small pause Henry laughed too.

Quite a pretty little face, with her mouth painted bright red and soft brown hair halfway down her back. She plucked up her courage and came in. I supposed she was from the disco, she'd lost her friends, perhaps her boyfriend, judging from the anxious look on her face. She came right past us, squeezing through spaces that weren't there. She was teetering on those crazy wedge-soled shoes.

Then a gang of sailors lurched in, in their Navy uniforms. They were all fairly drunk. One of them, he couldn't stand unsupported. Straight away they started larking with the four girls at the table.

The bell rang for final orders. It was my round so, though I didn't particularly want another, I asked Henry. He wasn't fussy, he said, he'd make his last. The reed-girl went out again, she hadn't found her boyfriend. At the far end of the bar a bit of a scuffle broke out, there was the sound of breaking glass, but they're used to that sort of thing in The Volunteer, and it didn't amount to much. When the barmen pulled down the shutters,

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Henry said, "The guillotine descends."

We went out onto the pavement. The pattern was you stood talking for a few minutes as the crowd started drifting away. In a doorway opposite I thought I saw a white blouse, but I didn't say anything. One of the sailors was being sick against the wall. It was a mild night, smooth and misty, the sort of night I somehow associated with the old days. The fresh air was reviving me, I was enjoying it again, the nostalgia, so to speak.

"Curly," said Henry, "night's candles are burnt out," and we started across the square. The white blouse was gone from the doorway. We took the steps down by the side of the church. There were still a good few people about, mostly, you could tell, heading home from the pubs. At the bottom we turned toward the canal.

"It was six," said Henry, "we did together. And I'm not counting that redhead. Curly, what would you reckon the score stands at now?"

I didn't take it in. Perhaps I refused to take it in.

"Six in seven years. There's been another fifteen years," Henry reminded me. "Of course, I don't come down here as often as in the old days. As I say, it's not so much fun on your own." He looked at me inquiringly. "You don't care to hazard a guess, then." I just shook my head.

You see, it had never occurred to me he'd gone on with it. Gone on with it alone. So far as I was concerned, it was so much a thing of the past, it belonged to 15 years ago. I almost never thought about it. I had almost forgotten them. All except, for some strange reason, the little redhead, and she was an accident, we never even laid a finger on her.

We'd reached the canal by now. I was in a daze. It's shattering, having something like that dragged up, that's been buried for 15 years. I was a different person then. Henry, I felt—well, I felt he should have grown out of it, too.

We'd lost the other drinkers when we'd started along the canal. The path used to be made of cinders, but now it was concreted over. As well as our own steps, I could hear, ahead of us, a clack-clack-clack, like someone chopping wood. Then, where the path passed the old brickworks, I saw her white blouse.

Henry, I realized, must have spotted her all the time. He reached into his jacket pocket. I knew what for without seeing it. It was like one of those dreams that keep repeating themselves, so you know what's coming in advance. He'd taken off his glasses, I

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hadn't previously noticed. His hand glittered.

We were walking more quickly than she was on those ridiculous shoes. She didn't start to run until we were less than 50 feet behind. By a strange coincidence it was just about here, running toward the tunnel, that the redhead girl had slipped in the water.

In the darkness of the tunnel the white blouse stood out brightly, like a signal. Almost as soon as she'd started to run, her shoes must have come off, there was no more clack-clack-clack.

Henry was running a little ahead of me. Out of the tunnel, without stopping, he held out his hand, offering the loop of wire.

What I should have done, but you don't think, I should have taken the wire from him and thrown it away. In the water. I suppose I couldn't believe it, that this was really happening. Not, so to speak, in the present.

When I didn't take the wire, Henry gave a sort of grin. He was glad. We used to take turn about, one holding her, the other tightening the loop round her neck. It was more exciting if you were the one with the wire.

We were only gaining slowly, the reed-girl could run. Though when we'd get to her, all skin and bones, she would be almost too easy. I remember that's what I thought, I couldn't help myself.

We were 20 feet behind. There was a scrapyard, and ahead another bridge. A voice called out "Jenny!" I think the caller must have been standing on the bridge.

He yelled her name again. "Jenny!" It might have been her lost boyfriend, there's no way of telling.

Henry stopped dead and I almost bumped into him. The man had come down off the bridge, and she ran into his arms. He was looking at us, over the top of her head.

Without undue haste we turned and started walking back. The full enormity, it was just beginning to hit me. Henry put his glasses on again and dropped the wire back in his pocket. "Better luck next time," he said, with a little smile.

The November 1977 issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale October 4.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

Now for the bad news. Because everyone associated with Ellery Queen's Mystery Newsletter loves detective fiction, it generally tries to provide information that is positive, bright, and cheerful. There has been no change in basic emotions, but every once in a while the dark and gloomy underside of the mysterious world must be noticed.

First, perhaps, a moment of silence for the many beloved mystery writers who have passed away during the past few months, especially Baynard Kendrick, Davis Dresser (Brett Halliday), and John Dickson Carr. It's unlikely that we will ever again see the likes of these masters, and we shall all be poorer for that.

Less serious, but also to be mourned, is the passing of *Mystery Monthly,* an ambitious magazine devoted to crime and detective fiction. It did not last even a year.

There is more. McKay/Washburn has dropped its mystery line. Despite the enormous esthetic and reasonable financial success of the mysteries it published during the past two years, that company elected to discontinue its detective fiction output in favor of more textbooks and other nonfiction.

A word, too, should be spoken against the quality of so many books produced today, with special emphasis on mystery novels. A book is a very special object in this world, one that deserves reverence and respect. People of culture and discrimination invariably develop a deep affection for books, which can never be replaced by video discs or microfilm or the other scientific innovations of our time. Some publishers continue to lavish the care and loving attention that their books deserve. Others, in a period of relentlessly skyrocketing costs, have been forced to cut back on the quality of their product. Every publisher has increased prices considerably, and that is unfortunate but understandable. What defeats comprehension is the inferior quality

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of the paper used in some books, the trashy dust wrappers that fall apart if you touch them, and bindings made of pressed cardboard instead of cloth. If some publishers can continue to produce volumes of sufficient quality to be worthy of the honored name of "book," why must other publishers turn out shoddy *kitsch* that disintegrates after one reading? It is up to all of us to demand the same quality of the physical product that we expect from the creative one.

Next issue, the good news.

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"Q"

BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Industrial shows are *never* open to the public, though full of dazzle and expensively mounted. This year the Milliken Fabrics presentation — an annual two-week run for buyers at the Waldorf-Astoria costing as much (a staggering $1 million) as a full-fledged Broadway staging—made an interesting contribution to the mystery genre. Using a "book" musical format for the first time, it told—lightheartedly—of murder at New York's great fashion houses. Assigned to the case, Rene Auberjonois uses the deductive styles and dress of Chan, Spade, Poirot, and others to investigate the bizarre deaths on stage of such luminaries as Alexis Smith, Van Johnson, Ann Miller, and Gloria Swanson. Of course it's all for fun (or fabrics), but all the same a vigorous new direction for the mystery stage.

It has been an interesting legitimate season on Broadway. *Buffalo Nickel* plots a rare coin heist; *Annie* is jovial melodrama right out of Dickens by way of Harold Gray's comic strip; the Bertolt Brecht musical *Happy End* is a tuneful Teutonic fantasy of the Chicago gangs (Peter Lorre was in the 1929 Berlin version). Off Broadway has seen something of an Agatha Christie bonanza: the National Arts Theater has been presenting rotating productions

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of *Ten Little Indians, Witness for the Prosecution,* and *Mousetrap* in incredible marathon weekends, while the Impossible Ragtime Theatre has resurrected Christie's neglected 1958 whodunit, *The Unexpected Guest,* in a superb staging that begins as a man in a wheelchair is shot to death in a fogbound country manor; the final surprise is in the very last line. *Agatha Christie, First Lady of Crime,* edited by H. R. F. Keating (Holt, Rinehart, Winston), contains essays on her plays and films.

On the television horizon, the Edgar-award-winning fact study of Texas murder among the rich, Thomas Thompson's *Blood and Money,* has been slated by CBS for development as a miniseries. Mobil Oil, long active in public broadcast funding, has strung together stations across the nation into a commercial "network" for high-caliber programming, mainly imported: some of the shows Mobil will present will be "Raffles, Gentleman Crook" (originally done last fall for British TV) and a series of Dick Francis racing mysteries, possibly including shot-in-Europe features of *Odds Against* and *Inquiry.*

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INTERVIEW: HILLARY WAUGH

One of the first writers to produce police procedural novels, Hillary Waugh has also been one of the most successful, his series about small-town cop Fred Fellows enjoying an enviable popularity. Proponents claim that *Last Seen Wearing* (1952) is the best of all procedurals, Julian Symons selecting it (at the suggestion of Raymond Chandler) for his authoritative list of the 100 greatest crime novels ever written.

EQMM: What do you like best about being a writer?

WAUGH: The best part, and the reason I'm glad I'm a writer, is that it never ends. There is no mandatory retirement at 65. I picture myself, if I'm still alive at 95, saying, "This is the best book yet."

EQMM: What is the worst, or the hardest, part of writing?

WAUGH: For me, the hardest part is whatever I happen to be working on at the moment. First, you sit down and try to think of an idea; this is very hard. While you're there, bleeding over ideas and plot problems, you think to yourself that any part of a book is easier than this. Then you actually write it. (I write the entire book through, without rereading it.) Slogging through that act is extremely difficult. The next step (the way I work, anyway) is rereading it and trying to figure out what to do with this mess. This is an agony.

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Then comes the second writing, to give it real shape, when at least you have something to hang your hat on. Then comes the best time—and this is a vision—when you sit down, late at night, in front of the fireplace, pick up the manuscript and read it. Suddenly, you get caught up in the story; and realize that you've got something here. You've got a book. That makes it all worthwhile.

EQMM: Like so many other authors, do you always consider the book you're presently working on your best book?

WAUGH: No. I always hope it will be, but I confess that I think *Last Seen Wearing* is my best book, and I think it's a very good one. Today, there are three books that I can pick up at any time and enjoy: that is one, and the others are *The Thin Man* and *The Maltese Falcon*. That's a terribly immodest thing to say, isn't it?

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

No matter how weary you think you are of the recent Sherlockian craze, Robert Lee Hall's *Exit Sherlock Holmes* (Scribners, $7.95) is a novel that must not be missed. A superior job in every way, it may be to book-length Holmes pastiches what Vincent Starrett's "The Unique Hamlet" is to short ones. Hall's version of "the truth" about Sherlock Holmes, brother Mycroft, and Professor Moriarty is as fantastic and controversial as any, but it is based on the comforting assumption that Watson never lied to us, always told the truth as he saw it. (****)

Nicholas Meyer's 1976 best-seller, *The West End Horror,* now in paperback (Ballantine, $1.75), is entertaining and cunningly plotted but simply not in a class with Hall's book as a pastiche. Michael Harrison, possibly the most learned and certainly the most prolific of Sherlockian scholars, has tackled a job only he could in *I, Sherlock Holmes* (Dutton, $12.50), editing and annotating the Great Detective's memoirs. It's an impressive job but can be recommended only to readers with an unlimited appetite for in-depth Holmesian speculation.

Amazingly enough, other writers than Doyle are sometimes pastiched. N. Z. Zaroulis successfully approximates the style of the Father of the Detective Story in *The Poe Papers* (Putnam, $7.95), in which a young scholar seeks the Poe-Richmond letters in Lowell, Mass., and goes to great lengths to get them. (***) In *Raffles* (Putnam, $7.95), David Fletcher presents seven well crafted and often very funny stories of the amateur cracks-

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man created by E. W. Hornung. Fletcher's pastiches differ from Barry Perowne's in two major respects: they are written in the third person and do not provide Raffles with a Robin Hood motivation for each of his crimes. (***)

**** Eric Ambler: *The Siege of the Villa Lipp,* Random House, $8.95. A new look at high-level international crime from one of the undisputed masters. Beautifully written, memorably cast, hilarious, thought-provoking, and completely original from start to ambiguous end.

**** Terrel Miedaner: *The Soul of Anna Klane,* Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, $8.95. In one of the most unusual murder trials in fictional annals, the defense attorney must prove the existence of the soul to save his client. Compulsive reading and one of a kind.

*** Michael Innes: *The Gay Phoenix,* Dodd, Mead, $6.95. The latest Appleby story offers new variations on the time-honored impersonation theme and the inverted detective story à la Thorndyke and Columbo. Witty and ingenious as always.

*** Robert Barnard: *Death of an Old Goat,* Walker, $6.95. A second-string Australian university is the setting for a delightful first mystery, reminiscent in style of Emma Lathen, Joyce Porter, and Colin Watson. It's fairly clued with a nice extra shock at the end. Inspector Royle rivals Dover for undiluted obnoxiousness, and the victim is a marvelous character.

*** W. J. Burley: *The Schoolmaster,* Walker, $6.95. A very well written and beautifully constructed British mystery with a memorable central character in schoolmaster Arthur Milton, murder suspect. The book employs a jack-in-the-box plotting style similar to Richard Neely's.

*** James P. Hogan: *Inherit the Stars,* Del Rey-Ballantine, $1.50. Scientists try to solve the mystery of a 50,000-year-old corpse in a spacesuit, found on the moon. The novel provides a perfect illustration of the close affinity of the classical, analytical detective story and the "hard" science-fiction tale, though, like the timetable puzzles of Freeman Wills Crofts, it will not be to every reader's taste.

*** Stanley Cohen: *330 Park,* Putnam, $8.95. A fast-moving and entertaining hijack novel in which a would-be master criminal holds a whole New York office building for ransom. Strong on technical details, less so on characterization.

Hildegarde Dolson's *Beauty Sleep* (Lippincott, $7.95) brings back artist Lucy Ramsdale and her retired policeman boarder James MacDougal for another light and neat whodunit, set this time in a beauty spa. (***) . . . Latest large canvas horror novel from James Herbert is *The Survivor* (Signet, $1.75), as capably written and somewhat more original than *The Rats* and *The Fog.*

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(***) . . . Harry Carmichael's veteran team of crime reporter Quinn and insurance investigator Piper look into a fashionable doctor's apparent suicide in *The Motive* (Dutton, $6.95), routine but enjoyable reading. (**) . . . J. F. Burke's *The Kama Sutra Tango* (Harper and Row, $7.95) can be recommended, for its colorful background, to fans of the late David Alexander's Broadway mysteries, though the plot goes to pieces in overdone carnage, reminiscent of too many contemporary movies. (**)

Don't miss *Agatha Christie, First Lady of Crime* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, $12.95), edited by H. R. F. Keating, a splendid collection of essays, mostly by fellow mystery novelists, examining nearly every aspect of Christie's works. The plentiful illustrations add to the book's value . . . Bill Pronzini has edited a first rate anthology of railroad stories, most but not all mysteries, in *Midnight Specials* (Bobbs-Merrill, $10.95), which also includes a selected bibliography of criminous train literature.

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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
Ambler, Eric	THE SIEGE OF THE VILLA LIPP	Random House	$8.95	$6.95
Burke, J. F.	THE KAMA SUTRA TANGO	Harper & Row	7.95	6.35
Carmichael, Harry	THE MOTIVE	Dutton	6.95	5.50
Cohen, Stanley	330 PARK	Putnam	8.95	6.95
Cullen, Tom	THE MILD MURDERER: The True Story of the Dr. Crippen Case	Houghton, Mifflin	8.95	6.95
Davis, Mildred	SCORPION	Random House	6.95	5.50
Dolson, Hildegarde	BEAUTY SLEEP	Lippincott	7.95	6.35
Hall, Robert Lee	EXIT SHERLOCK HOLMES	Scribners	7.95	6.35
Harrison, Michael	I, SHERLOCK HOLMES	Dutton	12.50	10.00
Edited by Hoch, Edward D.	BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR	Dutton	8.95	6.95
Hubert, Tord	THE TRAP	McKay	6.95	5.50
Innes, Michael	THE GAY PHOENIX	Dodd, Mead	6.95	5.50
Edited by Keating, H. R. F.	AGATHA CHRISTIE, FIRST LADY OF CRIME	Holt, Rinehart & Winston	12.95	10.35
Linzee, David	DEATH IN CONNECTICUT	McKay/Ives Washburn	7.95	6.35
MacDougall, James K.	WEASEL HUNT	Bobbs, Merrill	8.95	6.95
McCloy, Helen	THE IMPOSTER	Dodd, Mead	6.95	5.50
Edited by Penzler, Otto, Steinbrunner, Chris, and Lachman, Marvin	DETECTIONARY	Viking	15.00	12.00
Pronzini, Bill	MIDNIGHT SPECIALS	Bobbs-Merrill	10.95	8.50
Edited by Ellery Queen	FACES OF MYSTERY	Dial Press	8.95	6.95
Williams, David	UNHOLY WRIT	St. Martin's Press	7.95	6.35

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EQMM BOOK DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT

The titles which we are offering this month are listed on the previous page. These books are regular publishers' editions, the very same as those available in bookstores. Only those books which appear can be ordered; we are not in a position to order other books so please do not include any others on the Order Form.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

WEASEL HUNT, by James K. MacDougall. Bobbs-Merrill Co., $8.95.

This is a superior private-eye novel in the tradition of Ross Macdonald. The detective is David Stuart—pugnacious and compassionate. He receives an anonymous letter tipping him off to the unearthing of a body on the Larch estate in a posh section of Cleveland. He meets the Larches and finds more skeletons aboveground in that conflict-wracked family: Mrs. Larch, an imperious matriarch, hates her sons; Robert and Ben hate each other. All are frightened by the shadow of the "weasel," who has made their lives a 20-year-old nightmare.

THE IMPOSTOR, by Helen McCloy. Dodd, Mead, $6.95.

A victim in a car accident, Marina Skinner had been rushed to Sanders Clinic. Dr. Sanders told her that her husband Victor would be coming to take her home, but the man who appeared in the doorway was not Victor. Wanting to leave, she pretended to recognize him as her husband and walked out with the impostor, who then disappeared before she could question him.

Where was Victor? Marina's search took her among strange people. Then, when she discovered a murder, circumstances made it impossible for her to go to the police.

A chilling new novel by the author of *A Changeling Conspiracy.*

FACES OF MYSTERY, Edited by Ellery Queen. The Dial Press, $8.95.

This hardcover edition of *Ellery Queen's Anthology #34* includes a short novel by the magnetic Rex Stout, 3 novelets by the intriguing Georges Simenon, Lawrence G. Blochman, and Julian Symons, and 14 stories by such enduring talents in the mystery field as Dick Francis, Hugh Pentecost, Michael Gilbert, Robert L. Fish, Patricia Highsmith, and Ellery Queen.

The collection mirrors a variety of crimes, characters, and settings —all brought together by the ingenious editor in whose magazine most of the stories first appeared.

THE MILD MURDERER: The True Story of the Dr. Crippen Case, by Tom Cullen. Houghton Mifflin Company, $8.95.

In 1910 Dr. Hawley Harvey Crippen poisoned his wife, mutilated and buried her remains in the cellar, and fled London with his mistress. Their capture, after a breathtaking chase across the Atlantic, was credited to wireless telegraphy, used for the first time to fight crime. The worldwide clamor that ensued, and Crippen's startling character transformation, make the case high drama. Set in the colorful worlds of quack medicine and music halls, Tom Cullen's lively reconstruction of the crime gives an unusual picture of Edwardian society. An Alternate Selection of the Literary Guild. Alternate Selection of the Doubleday Book Club.

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a *NEW* short-short by

BILL PRONZINI

"Walter's breath seemed to clog in his lungs; he tasted the brassiness of fear" . . .

UNDER THE SKIN

by BILL PRONZINI

In the opulent lobby lounge of the St. Francis Hotel, where he and Tom Olivet had gone for a drink after the A.C.T. dramatic production was over, Walter Carpenter sipped his second Scotch-and-water and thought that he was a pretty lucky man. Good job, happy marriage, kids of whom he could be proud, and a best friend who had a similar temperament, similar attitudes, aspirations, likes and dislikes. Most people went through life claiming lots of casual friends and a few close ones, but seldom did a perfectly compatible relationship develop as it had between Tom and him. He knew brothers who were not nearly as close. Walter smiled. That's just what the two of us are like, he thought. Brothers.

Across the table Tom said, "Why the sudden smile?"

"Oh, just thinking that we're a hell of a team," Walter said.

"Sure," Tom said. "Carpenter and Olivet, the Gold Dust Twins."

Walter laughed. "No, I mean it. Did you ever stop to think how few friends get along as well as we do? I mean, we like to do the same things, go to the same places. The play tonight, for example. I couldn't get Cynthia to go, but as soon as I mentioned it to you, you were all set for it."

"Well, we've known each other for twenty years," Tom said. "Two people spend as much time together as we have, they get to thinking alike and acting alike. I guess we're one head on just about everything, all right."

"A couple of carbon copies," Walter said. "Here's to friendship."

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They raised their glasses and drank, and when Walter put his down on the table he noticed the hands on his wristwatch. "Hey," he said. "It's almost eleven thirty. We'd better hustle if we're going to catch the train. Last one for Daly City leaves at midnight."

"Right," Tom said.

They split the check down the middle, then left the hotel and walked down Powell Street to the Bay Area Rapid Transit station at Market. Ordinarily one of them would have driven in that morning from the Monterey Heights area where they lived two blocks apart; but Tom's car was in the garage for minor repairs, and Walter's wife Cynthia had needed their car for errands. So they had ridden a BART train in, and after work they'd had dinner in a restaurant near Union Square before going on to the play.

Inside the Powell station Walter called Cynthia from a pay phone and told her they were taking the next train out; she said she would pick them up at Glen Park. Then he and Tom rode the escalator down to the train platform. Some 20 people stood or sat there waiting for trains, half a dozen of them drunks and other unsavory-looking types. Subway crime had not been much of a problem since BART, which connected several San Francisco points with a number of East Bay cities, opened two years earlier. Still, there were isolated incidents. Walter began to feel vaguely nervous; it was the first time he had gone anywhere this late by train.

The nervousness eased when a westbound pulled in almost immediately and none of the unsavory-looking types followed them into a nearly empty car. They sat together, Walter next to the window. Once the train had pulled out he could see their reflections in the window glass. *Hell,* he thought, *the two of us even looked alike sometimes. Carbon copies, for a fact. Brothers of the spirit.*

A young man in workman's garb got off at the 24th and Mission stop, leaving them alone in the car. Walter's ears popped as the train picked up speed for the run to Glen Park. He said, "These new babies really move, don't they?"

"That's for sure," Tom said.

"You ever ride a fast-express passenger train?"

"No," Tom said. "You?"

"No. Say, you know what would be fun?"

"What?"

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"Taking a train trip across Canada," Walter said. "They've still got these crack expresses up there—they run across the whole of Canada from Vancouver to Montreal."

"Yeah, I've heard about those," Tom said.

"Maybe we could take the familes up there and ride one of them next summer," Walter said. "You know, fly to Vancouver and then fly home from Montreal."

"Sounds great to me."

"Think the wives would go for it?"

"I don't see why not."

For a couple of minutes the tunnel lights flashed by in a yellow blur; then the train began to slow and the globes steadied into a widening chain. When they slid out of the tunnel into the Glen Park station, Tom stood up and Walter followed him to the doors. They stepped out. No one was waiting to get on, and the doors hissed closed again almost immediately. The westbound rumbled ahead into the tunnel that led to Daly City.

The platform was empty except for a man in an overcoat and a baseball cap lounging against the tiled wall that sided the escalators; Walter and Tom had been the only passengers to get off. The nearest of the two electronic clock-and-message boards suspended above the platform read 12:02.

The sound of the train faded into silence as they walked toward the escalators, and their steps echoed hollowly. Midnight-empty this way, the fluorescent-lit station had an eerie quality. Walter felt the faint uneasiness return and impulsively quickened his pace.

They were ten yards from the escalators when the man in the overcoat moved away from the wall and came toward them. He had the collar pulled up around his face and his chin tucked down into it; the bill of the baseball cap hid his forehead, so that his features were shadowy. His right hand was inside a coat pocket.

The hair prickled on Walter's neck, and he glanced at Tom to keep from staring at the approaching man, but Tom did not seem to have noticed him at all.

Just before they reached the escalators the man in the overcoat stepped across in front of them, blocking their way, and planted his feet. They pulled up short. Tom said, "Hey," and Walter thought in sudden alarm: Oh, my God!

The man took his hand out of his pocket and showed them the long thin blade of a knife. "Wallets," he said flatly. "Hurry it up, don't make me use this."

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Walter's breath seemed to clog in his lungs; he tasted the brassiness of fear. There was a moment of tense inactivity, the three of them as motionless as wax statues in a museum exhibit. Then, jerkily, his hand trembling, Walter reached into his jacket pocket and fumbled his wallet out.

But Tom just stood staring, first at the knife and then at the man's shadowed face. He did not seem to be afraid. His lips were pinched instead with anger. "A damned mugger," he said.

Walter said, "Tom, for God's sake!" and extended his wallet. The man grabbed it out of his hand, shoved it into the other slash pocket. He moved the knife slightly in front of Tom.

"Get it out," he said.

"No," Tom said, "I'll be damned if I will."

Walter knew then, instantly, what was going to happen next. Close as the two of them were, he was sensitive to Tom's moods. He opened his mouth to shout at him, tell him not to do it; he tried to make himself grab onto Tom and stop him physically. But the muscles in his body seemed paralyzed.

Then it was too late. Tom struck the man's wrist, knocked it and the knife to one side, and lunged forward.

Walter stood there, unable to move, and watched the mugger sidestep awkwardly, pulling the knife back. The coat collar fell away, the baseball cap flew off as Tom's fist grazed the side of the man's head—and Walter could see the mugger's face clearly: beard-stubbled, jutting chin, flattened nose, wild blazing eyes.

The knife, glinting light from the overhead fluorescents, flashed between the mugger and Tom, and Tom stiffened and made a grunting, gasping noise. Walter looked on in horror as the man stepped back with the knife, blood on the blade now, blood on his hand. Tom turned and clutched at his stomach, eyes glazing, and then his knees buckled and he toppled over and lay still.

He killed him, Walter thought, he killed Tom—but he did not feel anything yet. Shock had given the whole thing a terrible dreamlike aspect. The mugger turned toward him, looked at him out of those burning eyes. Walter wanted to run, but there was nowhere to go with the tracks on both sides of the platform, the electrified rails down there, and the mugger blocking the escalators. And he could not make himself move now any more than he had been able to move when he realized Tom intended to fight.

The man in the overcoat took a step toward him, and in that

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moment, from inside the eastbound tunnel, there was the faint rumble of an approaching train. The suspended message board flashed CONCORD, and the mugger looked up there, looked back at Walter. The eyes burned into him an instant longer, holding him transfixed. Then the man turned sharply, scooped up his baseball cap, and ran up the escalator.

Seconds later he was gone, and the train was there instead, filling the station with a rush of sound that Walter could barely hear for the thunder of his heart.

The policeman was a short thickset man with a black mustache, and when Walter finished speaking he looked up gravely from his notebook. "And that's everything that happened, Mr. Carpenter?"

"Yes," Walter said, "that's everything."

He was sitting on one of the round tile-and-concrete benches in the center of the platform. He had been sitting there ever since it happened. When the eastbound train had braked to a halt, one of its disembarking passengers had been a BART security officer. One train too late, Walter remembered thinking dully at the time; he's one train too late. The security officer had asked a couple of terse questions, then had draped his coat over Tom and gone upstairs to call the police.

"What can you tell me about the man who did it?" the policeman asked. "Can you give me a description of him?"

Walter's eyes were wet; he took out his handkerchief and wiped them, shielding his face with the cloth, then closing his eyes behind it. When he did that he could see the face of the mugger: the stubbled cheeks, the jutting chin, the flat nose—and the eyes, above all those terribly malignant eyes that had said as clearly as though the man had spoken the words aloud: *I've got your wallet, I know where you live. If you say anything to the cops I'll come after you and give you what I gave your friend.*

Walter shuddered, opened his eyes, lowered the handkerchief, and looked over to where the group of police and laboratory personnel were working around the body. Tom Olivet's body. Tom Olivet, lying there dead.

We were like brothers, Walter thought. We were just like brothers.

"I can't tell you anything about the mugger," he said to the policeman. "I didn't get a good look at him. I can't tell you anything at all."

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Jane Beckman's first story, "Here Comes the Bride," appeared in the October 1974 issue of EQMM. Now, three years later, we bring you her second story, and it offers an interesting point of technique. The 'tec trinity of criminal investigation, in fiction as well as in real life, is to establish motive, means, and opportunity. Jane Beckman has tried (quoting from her letter) "an experiment to see what would happen if motive, opportunity, and even the questioning of suspects were more or less done away with"—whether such an approach could "work more successfully than stories written in the traditional form."

See what you think—and thank Edgar, our Patron Saint, that newcomers to the field are still experimenting . . .

A TEXTBOOK CASE

by JANE BECKMAN

The confusion that followed our finding Renee Hollings dead had subsided by the time the Chief of Police and one of his patrolmen arrived. I waited with the others in Renee's living room, sitting in one corner of the sofa and hoping not to be noticed—at least, not immediately. Eventually he'd see me. The Chief of Police, Henry Trumbull, was not going to be happy finding the only female member of his ten-member force at a party where a murder had occurred. He certainly was not going to be happy finding me there in a belly dancer's costume. It's hard enough for him to accept me in a police uniform.

I could tell by the expression on Trumbull's face, by the way he blinked when he came through the door, that when they'd called in to report Renee's death they had forgotten to mention that a costume party was in progress. He stopped just inside the door and stared for a full thirty seconds at the slender young man in cowboy hat, red plaid flannel shirt, and Levis who held the door open for him. What Trumbull was trying to decide was whether

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that gun he had strapped on was really a toy.

His eyes moved from the cowboy to a *femme fatale* in a slinky dress and a black feather boa. Then from her to a 125-pound Tarzan pouring a beer for a hairy-legged hulk of a Jane in fake silver-blonde wig. Trumbull wrinkled his brow, puzzled when he got to Curt Knox standing at the end of the sofa. I didn't blame him. We'd all had a hard time figuring out that Curt's skin-tight starched white-cotton jumpsuit and white plastic swim cap were supposed to make him look like a Man from Mars. But people who teach college history, like Curt, aren't supposed to have imagination in their heads, just facts.

Trumbull gave me an interested look, but I could tell he didn't recognize me. All that eye makeup and the long black wig. And my midriff prominently displayed.

I was watching him when he looked at Alana Taber gathered up inside yards of dull reddish-brown cloth, the lens of her eyeglasses flush with the inside of the eyeholes, her short, chubby leotard-covered legs protruding from the legholes. I bet myself he would never guess the meaning of Alana's costume. Not in a week.

Trumbull stood there inside the door looking calm, like a man in charge. But I knew he was trying to remember everything he was supposed to do. Drunks, family fights, and crazy kids ODing on dope are the bulk of our business. Murder is rare. Thank goodness! I've never in my life seen anything as horrible as Renee's face when I went in and saw her lying there strangled on her bedroom floor. If it hadn't been for all that Sangria I'd drunk, I probably would have gone to pieces.

Trumbull was not doing badly. Politely telling everybody not to leave, asking us to give our names to Billy Welch, the patrolman, saying to Curt Knox, who was acting as a sort of spokesman, that he wanted to look at Renee. Going to the bedroom, coming back, and saying to Billy, "Call Jake and Fred. We're going to need a couple of more men down here."

It was time I gave him the bad news that I was there. The metal coins sewn to my halter jangled as I got up from the sofa. "I'm here, sir," I said.

Chief Trumbull knew the voice. He looked, but he didn't say anything. The patrolman Billy squinted. "Is that *you*, Marianne?"

The 125-pound Tarzan snickered. "Great detectives our police are. They don't even recognize another member of their force."

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That crew gives me a hard time, but I don't like them put down. I told Tarzan, "A good undercover agent is never recognized by *anybody*, not even by another member of his own organization." One of those said-without-thinking remarks I make too many of. And suddenly there was a change in the room. Ten seconds before I had been part of a group banded together and prepared to face police questioning. With that one remark I'd shoved myself over to the other side.

The other side steered me down the hall into the room where Renee was and shut the door before I had time to say any more. Renee's body was on the floor near the closet door. The only light in the room came from a bedside lamp, but it was sufficient light to see that Trumbull's face was red with anger.

"I know. I shouldn't have said it," I said. "I just didn't like him putting down the police force. It's bad enough you should find me here. It's doubly bad that I made some stupid remark about undercover agents. Actually, you'd be happier if I *was* an undercover agent—if I was far enough undercover so that nobody knew I was part of your department. It's too bad the same broad-minded city council that went along with your efforts to professionalize a small-town police force was the same city council that said it was the 1970's and the Age of Women's Lib and that you had to hire a woman. So you got stuck with me. You've had a hard six weeks, Chief."

Trumbull stared down at the expanse of my bare midriff. "Don't you have any other clothes? You didn't walk through the streets like that?"

"Get me something out of the closet. There ought to be a navy-blue trench coat. I can't go over there."

"You can't go—" He stopped in mid-sentence, dumfounded.

"Well, of course not," I said impatiently.

Trumbull shook his head, went to the closet, got the coat, and handed it to me. "Who's this dead woman, and who are those characters out there in the living room?"

I pulled on the coat and belted it. "Her name is Renee Hollings. She lives in the house. This was her party. Last semester she was taking courses at the college, but this semester she's not taking anything except the belly-dance class. That's how I met her. We were in the same class."

Trumbull scowled.

"There is nothing indecent about belly dancing," I said. "It's

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good exercise. And besides, it's taught in the Adult Education Center."

"She live here by herself?" Trumbull asked.

I knew he had seen that at least one-third of the closet contained men's clothing. "Curt Knox—he teaches at the college—lives here with her, at least part of the time."

"Which one is he?"

"The man in the white Man-from-Mars outfit."

"Is that what he's supposed to be? Didn't look like much of anything as far as I'm concerned. Just those zippers in the sleeves and in the pants bottoms. Think he'd at least have an antenna on his head."

The same kind of narrow-mindedness that causes Henry Trumbull to think Men-from-Mars costumes must have antennae is the same kind of narrow-mindedness that causes him not to want a female on his police force. I let the prejudice pass without comment. There was something else I had to tell him. "You should know," I said, "that she was killed when she came back here to the bedroom to change clothes. And the reason she came back was that we both were wearing the same costumes. She didn't invite me until Tuesday night when I saw her in class. And then I was on duty Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday and I didn't have time to make or rent a costume, so I just wore my belly-dancing outfit."

"Well, couldn't you both be at a party dressed like belly dancers?"

"Certainly. But Renee kept apologizing because she hadn't invited me sooner and that she hadn't worn another something else. She said she had an Indian Princess costume from another party, so she came to the bedroom to put it on. And then she didn't come back, and finally in between all the Sangria and the pizza we noticed she wasn't there. And when I found her she was there on the floor. She'd taken off the belly-dance costume and was wearing that caftan, and I didn't even see the Indian Princess costume."

"You were there in the living room. Did you see anybody coming down the hallway this way?"

"Of course, lots of people were coming back to this part of the house. The bathroom is down this hall."

"Well," said Trumbull, "we'll have our hands full checking out who came back here and how long they stayed and if anybody saw anybody else going into the bedroom."

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"You won't have to bother with all that," I said. "It's obvious—"

"Obvious what?" demanded Trumbull. "What do you mean obvious? Obvious who killed her?"

I had said the wrong thing. Because it was obvious to me, I assumed it was to him also. I had obviously made the wrong assumption.

Billy's soft knock on the door spared me more words from Trumbull. The Chief of Police opened the door and the patrolman came into the room.

"Got the names and addresses and stuff on all those people out there." He gestured with the notebook in his hand. "The two guys that have got on those furry kind of bathing-suit things—"

"They are dressed as Tarzan and Jane," I said.

"Oh, is that what it is? Well, anyway, the skinny guy's name is Francis Borrell and the big one is Gene N. Timmins. They own some kind of clothing store."

"A boutique," I said.

"Gal all dressed up in brown is named Alana Taber. Not married. She's some kind of a teacher at the college. And so is that guy in that funny tight-fitting white outfit. Knox is his name—Curt Knox." Billy turned to me. "Say, Marianne, what's that Taber gal supposed to be, anyway? She's even got her head covered up in that brown cloth. And she smells funny. Sort of reminds you of cooking."

"The odor you noticed, so she informed me, is a carefully calculated mixture of onions, garlic, molasses, bacon, and pepper. Think about that, and then think about the shape of the costume—roundish, oblong, brown."

"For Pete's sake," Trumbull exploded. "A woman is lying over there on the floor dead. We haven't got time to play guessing games."

"Boston baked bean," I said.

"No kidding," said Billy and looked back at his list. "The guy in the cowboy suit says his name is William Litton Raynes and he doesn't have a job, but wanted me to be sure and write down 'currently unemployed.' And he's staying with some people over at Thunderhead Court."

"Here in town?" asked Trumbull.

Billy nodded. "That gal all dressed up with all those feathers around her didn't want to tell me what her name was, but that Knox fellow finally talked her into it."

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I looked at the notebook where Billy had written: Carolyn Coe. I said, "She purposely let you make a mistake, She spells it K-A-R-O-L-E-N-E, and the last name is Poe not Coe. The reason she's a little uptight about giving you her name is that she's married, but she came to the party with Bill Raynes. She brought her costume with her in a big purse and put it on after she got here. Her husband thinks she's gone to see a sister who is in the hospital."

"And then, the last name I've got on the list is Marianne Martin." Billy turned to me. "You want me to list the Police Department for your address, or you want me to put down your house address?"

I could see the expression on Trumbull's face out of the corner of my eye. "Better list my home address," I said.

Billy said to Trumbull, "That bunch out there wants to know if you want to ask them any questions or if they can go on home?"

"Ask them questions!" Trumbull exploded. "According to Superwoman here we won't have to ask them any questions. She says it's perfectly obvious who strangled that woman."

"Oh," said Billy. "Something you read in the book?"

The answer to that question was yes. And therein lies the crux of the problem between Henry Trumbull and myself. Trumbull will go to those two-day training sessions and believe anything a lecturer says. But he thinks books are written by people out of touch with reality. Anything in a textbook in suspect. So not only does the fact I'm the only member of his police force with a college degree rankle him, but when I began police work, I immediately enrolled in a night course in criminal investigation—and that rankles him even more. He might have been able to accept a woman on the police force, but one who was learning scientific criminology techniques from a textbook was too much for him.

"Obvious nothing," said Trumbull. "If I'd been here at this party parading around in some crazy get-up, maybe it would seem obvious to me too. I might know which one of those birds had a reason to kill her."

"I don't have the foggiest notion about who had a reason to kill her," I said. "Renee was a sweet kid whose parents funneled her all the money she wanted to live her life the way she decided she wanted to 'fulfill her soul' at the moment. The phrase is hers. Check out motives, if you want to, but you would be wasting your

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time. It's obvious just looking at the costumes who killed her. Practically a textbook case, I'd say."

"A textbook case, huh?" asked Trumbull, sarcasm thick in his tone. "Don't bother with lab tests. Don't need an autopsy. Just look at what everybody has got on. I suppose since Tarzan swings through trees on a vine and she was strangled with a rope belt, then that proves it was him."

"I got it," said Billy, snapping his fingers. "She was strangled. That Taber gal is dressed up like a Boston baked bean. The Boston Strangler. She did it."

It was getting out of hand. I said, "No, we'll definitely need the lab. That's the reason I asked you to get the coat. I wanted to stay away from Renee so as not to mess up the lab test."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Chief Trumbull demanded.

"In a forensic laboratory they have techniques by which they can go over the clothing of a victim and find things—lint, a thread, a hair, a button—from the one who committed the crime. You can't strangle somebody without getting close. Renee surely struggled. She was a healthy young woman whose muscles were in excellent condition from the belly dancing. I purposely insisted she not be covered, and let no one come near her after I found her body. One look and there was no doubt she was dead, so there was no reason to feel for a pulse."

"You're saying whoever strangled her was bound to get up close enough to her they'd leave something from their clothes on her."

"More or less. Only, they aren't going to find anything on Renee. Nothing at all."

Billy blinked. And Trumbull said, "If you're going to talk in circles—"

"No," I said, "look at the costumes out there. Bill Raynes in the cowboy costume has that flannel shirt, and flannel sheds lint. If Karolene in that black boa got close enough to strangle Renee, she would surely have left feathers behind. Tarzan and Jane are wearing fuzzy fake fur, and that wig Timmins is wearing has been shedding all evening. Alana Taber would have left behind some of the odor of the greasy mixture. And if I'd done it, I would have torn loose some coins or beads or fringe."

"That leaves only the Knox fellow," said Trumbull.

"In a not-so-realistic Man-from-Mars costume," I said. "Stiffly

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starched white cotton sheds no lint. Zipper closings—no buttons. Tight fit of clothing at ankles and wrists. Plastic swim cap covering hair. No belt. As you pointed out, no antenna. It appears he read a criminology textbook and tried to beat the system, not realizing it might backfire on him."

Trumbull was skeptical, but when the state crime bureau rushed a lab test, and the report confirmed no costume finds on the body, we got a warrant for Curt Knox's arrest, located him at the airport about to board a little chartered plane for Mexico—then Trumbull was convinced.

DETECTIVERSE

WATCHDOG

by PATRICIA MOORE

He ripped off the Jones's house—a cinch;
Then he crept away inch by inch.
He was caught in the end
By his victims' best friend:
The Jones's Doberman made the pinsch.

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Thomas Otter's first stories—a pair titled "Assassination" and "The Staff of Elisha"—were published back to back in our April 1975 issue. The two first stories were as different from each other as one could imagine; and now his third story is utterly (Otterly) different again.

We can do no better than quote from the author's letter: "I suppose you could call this a crime story, although I am not sure who is the criminal and who is the victim." And we confess we're not sure either.

What do you think?

THE OTHER END OF THE BRIDGE

by THOMAS OTTER

Pritchard stepped out of the gloom of the *Kunstmuseum* into the deeper gloom of a November evening. It was half-past six. The rain had stopped, but a light mist was rising from the direction of the river. There would be fog later on. All the more reason to get a good dinner inside him and hurry back to a comfortable chair with a book at his hotel. It would be a quiet evening; he savored quiet evenings.

Strange about Friedmann, he thought as he turned right and walked toward the shadow of the Schlossberg that loomed, black on black, against the sky. Odd that any curator should be unfamiliar with one of the most striking items in his collection. It was true that the drawings were not on display; they were kept in a cabinet to be examined only by accredited scholars like himself. Still, such a drawing! How could Friedmann have wholly overlooked it? It belonged on the wall in a place of honor. Yet no one on the museum's staff seemed to know what Pritchard was talking about when he tried to describe it to them.

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The drawing was in black ink on brown-tinted paper, done with a stern, almost savage, economy of line. Above the legend *Das Opfer* a tall gaunt man was standing on a scaffold with a noose around his neck. A small crowd was clustered in front of him, ten or maybe a dozen. Their faces—fat faces many of them—were filled with hate and rancor. Some of them brandished clenched fists; some, with mouths agape, seemed to be shouting and cursing.

But the focus, to which every line subtly guided the eye, was the face of the man who was about to be hanged. Pritchard had never seen such a powerful expression of outraged incredulity. Innocence was too weak a word for it. Entirely too weak. This man simply could not believe what was happening to him. He was, in very fact, *Das Opfer*—"the victim." When the sacrificial lamb is led to the slaughter, no one asks of what sin it is guilty; but perhaps the lamb wonders. An unknown artist had managed to give the lamb a human face.

The style was reminiscent of Dürer but had its own flavor and its own vision. The Rennaissance wasn't Pritchard's cup of tea, really. His field was the South German Baroque. Last year a little book on Balthasar Neumann had brought him mild recognition and the Associate Professorship he had coveted. But if the opportunity offered, there was certainly nothing wrong with displaying scholarly versatility. He might get a nice little article for the *Burlington* out of the drawing. The social consciousness of Goya centuries before Goya's time—that would be his theme. If Friedmann was too stupid to know what was in his own museum (and really, the man had acted as if Pritchard were drunk or, for some obscure reason, making it all up), there would be double pleasure in snatching credit for discovering the drawing right from under the nose of the man who was responsible for its care but evidently too negligent and dull to look at it.

The headwaiter at the *Goldenes Kreuz* greeted him like an old patron. In a way he was, even though he had been here in Graz less than a week. He wasn't a man lightly to forsake a satisfactory restaurant once found. He formed habits effortlessly in all matters relating to the small comforts of life that meant so much to him. A bachelor in his late thirties, slightly plump and beginning to grow bald on the crown of his head, he was a man in whom fastidiousness and attachment to routine were passing over the line into fussiness and self-cosseting.

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In the spring he had been viciously struck down from behind and robbed in Central Park, only a few hundred feet from the Metropolitan Museum. This sabbatical had been taken partly to rest and let his nerves heal and partly to visit the provincial museums of South Germany and Austria. He had suffered a concussion and a laceration of the scalp. Such bodily injuries were soon mended, sooner than the grave insult to his sensibilities.

The mere suggestion of brutality had always been enough to turn Pritchard queasy. He was an Art Historian who had chosen to dwell affectionately on the stucco filigree and attenuated deceptive forms of a Baroque ceiling rather than, for instance, the strong neck and heavily muscled limbs of a Michelangelo statue. Strength and the latent violence that strength often implies repelled him. Now he jumped at shadows, and the very thought of being struck again could make his heart pound and his stomach churn.

Pritchard ate with the absorption of a man given to solitary pleasures. The restaurant around him was astir with life—people eating, laughing, quarreling, dallying, wooing—but all that was no business of his. He finished with a generous slice of *Rosenbergtorte,* a specialty of the house, compacted of countless wafer-thin layers of chocolate cake, Bavarian cream and almond paste topped with a gleaming drift of *Schlag,* the whipped cream that seemed so necessary to the Austrian way of life.

He ate it slowly, scraping the last few damp crumbs from the plate with his fork, much like a small boy trying to draw out his treat to the very last moment. To judge from the expression on his face, he would not have chosen differently even if he had been told that this was to be his last meal.

Back on the street ragged patches of fog were drifting and hovering, concealing from view now this housefront and now that, but he could still see well enough to walk. His hotel lay only five blocks away on the other side of the river. He would be there, he thought, in less than ten minutes. Yes, a stroll to aid digestion was preferable to trying to find a prowling taxi in this sleepy little city.

He turned toward the river and began to walk. For so early in the evening the street was oddly deserted. No doubt the natives knew these fogs of old and kept indoors if they could. In the first block he met no one except a tall thin man in a soiled raincoat, who was standing in the white cone of illuminated fog under a

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street lamp, peering at something in his hand. An address? A map? It was no business of Pritchard's. He hurried on.

In the block before the river the patches of fog were knitted into a continuous blanket that seemed to blot out sound as well as sight. The whole city was shrouded in dead silence except, as he now noticed for the first time, for the echoing footsteps of a man advancing behind him. The footsteps were gaining on him. Probably it was the man whom he had seen standing under the street lamp.

Whoever it might be, Pritchard quickened his pace to match that of the stranger. He had the same instinctive aversion we all have to being approached from behind in darkness, but in him recent experience had intensified the feeling and fortified vague dread with precise and painful recollections.

When he heard the stranger increase his pace in turn, Pritchard was ready to panic. His scalp tingled and burned in the spot where he had been struck from behind that evening in Central Park. He walked as fast as he could without breaking into a run. To run would have been to admit to himself that he was being pursued; he wasn't ready for that.

Why was there no one about? He thought of the other diners back in the *Goldenes Kreuz* with a sudden warmth. It was good to be among people. He should have lingered over a second cup of coffee. Struck up a conversation with the waiter. Asked about his family.

As he scurried across the last street parallel to the river and out onto the slight arch of the bridge, he could make out dimly the headlights of what might be a bus approaching from the other side. Thank God, there was somebody else abroad in this bad dream. Bridges hold us precariously above troubled waters, and we equate, however illogically, dry land with safety. It suddenly became very important for Pritchard to reach the other end of the bridge.

But it was not to be. The footsteps were right on his heels now. A hand plucking at his elbow wheeled him about as if Pritchard had been moved by springs. The stranger was taller than he had first thought and more than lean—gaunt, even cadaverous.

What did this man want? Pritchard's money? A match? Directions to some café or hotel? The gratification of some sadistic urge? Who ever knows what another man wants?

Pritchard knew only dread. It filled his mind. Before the man

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could speak, Pritchard pulled his wallet from his breast pocket and thrust it into the man's hand. "Here!" he whispered, as if the two of them were privy to some secret that must be kept from eavesdroppers in the surrounding fog. "Take it! But for God's sake don't hurt me."

He turned and darted out into the roadway in blind fear. For an instant the headlights of the oncoming bus outlined him with sculptural clarity against the swirls of enveloping whiteness. Brakes screamed as the high flat front of the bus beetled over him. There was a hollow boom, as if from a great steel drum, and he was flung, careening from foot to foot like a drunken dancer, eight or ten yards back in the direction from which he had come, before falling heavily and striking the back of his head against the curb.

For more than a minute by the clock Pritchard experienced an extraordinary lucidity. He heard, as he had never heard anything before, the suck of air as the bus doors opened and the excited voices of individual passengers as they emerged. Then a face loomed over him, far away but sharp and clear in every detail.

It was the face of the driver, a kindly face with a little tuft of hair growing from a birthmark on the left cheek. Why had Pritchard paid so little attention to these kind faces? All that would change in the future. He would be a different man.

The driver pulled off his uniform jacket, folded it, and moving with caution and tenderness, placed it under Pritchard's head. Now he could see the tableau that the lights from the bus illuminated across the way. Ten or twelve dismounted passengers were clustered around the tall gaunt man. They looked angry, threatening. A woman shook her umbrella at him. A fat man in a shiny brown leather coat brandished a rolled newspaper as if it were a mace.

"We saw it all," they were shouting. "We saw the whole thing."

"Thief!"

"Murderer!"

The man stood there mute, with Pritchard's wallet in his hand. As he began to realize what his accusers meant, the shock on his face gradually gave way to a look of disbelief and outrage. Pritchard felt sure that he had seen an expression like that somewhere not so long ago. He tried to remember where, but before it could come to him, the sole remaining connection parted and the chambers of his brain went dark.

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THE DARK GAMBLE: End of the Trail

by HUGH PENTECOST

(continued from page 18)

Months ago, when what Jason Dark called "the miracle of Sharon" took place, he had become aware that a new vulnerability had been added to his situation. For 22 years as a cop and more than five years as a private investigator, Dark had been a loner. It was an advantage for a man who insisted on projecting himself into the center of a violent world. He could remember wondering about other cops when he was on the force. He could recall tense moments he had shared with another man, a partner who was married and had a couple of kids. Would that man hesitate in a crisis, concerned about the future of his family without him?

Any judgments, any decisions that Jason Dark made down the years, had involved no one but himself. Risks were his to run without concern for anyone else. Then Sharon Evans had come into his life, a girl half his age. How could this lovely blonde girl love a short stocky little man in his fifties who peered at the world through slightly tinted, wire-rimmed glasses? It was a miracle. It had made over his life. He was loved and he loved. Now this thing that was so precious to him was being used against him, could destroy him.

He didn't care about himself. It was the terrible danger to Sharon that left him immobilized, sick with anxiety. In what Dark had thought of as a moment of triumph, the capture of a Quadrant terrorist, the blow had fallen.

"Call your apartment and talk to your Miss Sharon Evans," the Quadrant terrorist had said. "Or rather, try to talk to her. She isn't there, you see. If you have any hope of seeing her alive again, you will stand aside and let me go. In a couple of days when I am safely away, you will receive instructions on how you may be able to get her back."

Dark, gun in hand, had stood aside and let the terrorist go. He had no choice. Sharon, in the hands of Quadrant's people, was a weapon he couldn't match.

Or could he? . . .

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"I have lost the ability to think straight," Dark said to his friend.

The friend was sitting behind a Florentine desk in a plush office on the second floor of the Hotel Beaumont, New York City's top luxury hotel. His name was Pierre Chambrun, and he was the legendary manager of The Beaumont. He was perhaps a year or two older than Jason, elegantly tailored, with very bright black eyes almost buried in deep pouches.

An original Picasso of the Blue Period was on the wall opposite his desk; the oriental rug on the floor was a gift from a Middle Eastern potentate. Pierre Chambrun dealt in luxury and he lived in luxury. There were people who had known him 35 years ago in a different frame of reference. As a young man Chambrun had been a flamboyant hero in the French Resistance, fighting the Nazis who occupied his beloved Paris.

Chambrun knew the worlds of luxury and violence equally well. He saw people from both worlds pass through his hotel every day. The Beaumont was the home-away-from-home for politicians, diplomats, and lobbyists whose center of interest was the United Nations.

Chambrun listened to Dark's story, the smoke from one of his flat-shaped Egyptian cigarettes curling around his head.

"You have two choices," he said to Dark. "You give in to their demands, which will certainly be that you turn over to them the tapes and notes you have. You can hope that for that they will return your lady unharmed."

"Hope?"

Chambrun shrugged. "Why should they return Miss Evans? They can keep you out of business forever by holding onto her. Further than that, once they have your tapes and notes you no longer have any life insurance for yourself. You are alive, Jason, because you have something they need. Once you turn it over to them they can safely do away with the nuisance that is Jason Dark forever. They may turn your lady loose, but she will have no one to come back to."

Dark moistened dry lips. "And my second choice?"

"Fight," Chambrun said, his voice harsh and hard.

"And risk Sharon's life?"

"Whatever you do that's a risk you have to run."

Dark was silent for a few moments, and he was aware of compassion in his friend's eyes. "I have dreamed for a long time,"

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he said, "that I—all alone—could somehow smash Quadrant International. I have nit-picked at them, I have snapped at their heels like an aggressive fox terrier. But the dream of total victory was infantile—I realize that now."

Chambrun put out his cigarette in the brass ashtray on his desk. "Perhaps not," he said. "Not unless you are squeamish about fighting criminals in a criminal fashion."

"An eye for an eye?" Dark asked.

"A blackmail for a blackmail," Chambrun said. "How good is the evidence you have—these tapes, these notes?"

"Enough to embarrass them," Dark said. "Not good enough to sink them."

"Then we will have to find something that will sink them."

"We?"

Chambrun smiled at his friend. "You came to me for help, didn't you, Jason?"

Chambrun had poured two cups of Turkish coffee which he brewed in a samovar on the sideboard in a corner of his office. He sipped his with relish. Dark tasted and put his cup aside.

"To win a fight with a powerful enemy you have to know every detail of what makes him tick," Chambrun said. "Every habit, every technique, every move and countermove he will make automatically. At the same time you must make that enemy think you are capable of things of which you may not be."

"For example."

"Would you kill a man to get Sharon Evans back?" Chambrun asked.

"Yes," Dark said without hesitation. "If I was sure it would get her back."

Chambrun shook his head. "You must convince them that there are no 'ifs'."

"And whom do I kill?" Dark asked.

"You make them think you will kill a man," Chambrun said, "but what you really mean to kill is a system. The system that is called Quadrant International."

"In two days?"

"In two days—if you have the guts for it," Chambrun said. "The world is sick with violence and treachery and blackmail and terror. There are the fanatics who will die for a cause, like the Kamakazi pilots of Japan who dove into the smokestack of a bat-

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tleship to sink it, destroying themselves at the same time. Fanatics are hard to fight. The Nazis found that out in Paris long ago. But your Quadrant International people are not fanatics in the true sense. Their aims are money and power. They won't die to get them. They want to live to enjoy them. That is how they differ from the fanatic."

"So what good does it do me to know that?" Dark asked.

Chambrun sipped his coffee. "If you were tortured to reveal secrets that would endanger your country, would you talk?" Chambrun glanced at Dark's black-gloved hand. "I think we know you wouldn't. But if all you had to save was money, would you give up your life for it? After all, you wouldn't be able to spend it then, would you?" Chambrun's smile was wry. "You might also be afraid to die because you would have to face your God with all your guilts."

"It's an interesting lecture," Dark said, "but where does it get me?"

"You are fighting men who will not willingly die for what they want," Chambrun said. "That gives you an advantage because we know that you would die for what you want, the safety of your woman. That gives you a slight edge over your opponent as you face each other."

Chambrun raised his hand to silence an interruption. "Yes, an edge—no matter how big and powerful and rich he may be, you have the edge of the fanatic. You will go all the way—which means giving up your life—to win. He will spend all the money necessary, corrupt all the decent men necessary, put his competition out of business, bribe, steal, betray to win. But he will not give up his life, Jason, because that would make his victory meaningless. So I repeat, to start with you have an edge."

"That's comforting to know," Dark said. He sounded bitter. "But do you have any idea how I can use that edge?"

Chambrun grinned at him, an almost boyish grin. "Of course I do, or why would I bring it up?"

Guests of the Beaumont Hotel might have been disturbed if they knew how much the management knew about them when they signed in for a stay. Every morning a card passed across Chambrun's desk on which was the name of a newly registered guest. On it were letter symbols like A for alcoholic, WC for woman chaser, XX for a man double-crossing his wife, and WXX

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for a woman double-crossing her husband. There would also be a credit reference. At the Beaumont's prices they had to be sure a guest could pay for what he was contracting for. Hotel Security referred to these cards, preparing themselves for any intervention that might be necessary.

There was another symbol which was simply PC. That meant that Pierre Chambrun had special information about the guest which he kept to himself. If Chambrun had been a criminal, he could have run the greatest blackmail factory in the United States. He knew more about many of his guests than the State Department, the F.B.I., or the C.I.A. might have been expected to know. He used what he had to protect the hotel from scandal, from violence, from anything that would disrupt its Swiss-watch efficiency. The Beaumont was Chambrun's world, and he guarded it jealously.

On this day he did an unheard-of thing, something he had never done before in his long career as manager of the Beaumont. He made available to an outsider some secret PC information about a guest. After all, a girl's life was at stake.

"There is a man staying in my hotel who may be the key to your problem," Chambrun said. He had gone to the wall safe and taken from it a card, an ordinary filing card. It rested on the desk in front of him. "He is an Egyptian citizen, but in truth he belongs to no country unless you think of Quadrant International as a nation. This man's father was an important political figure in Egypt in the days of the late king. The father married a famous British actress named Lois Dexter.

"Your man, my guest, chooses to call himself Dexter Fahid. He's about thirty-five years old. He has bank accounts in New York, London, Cairo, and almost certainly in Switzerland. Secret-numbered accounts in Switzerland. He has a Rolls-Royce at his disposal here in New York, another in London, a third in Cairo. He has his own private jet plane. And yet, Jason, this man inherited nothing from his father or his mother but his wits.

"He has amassed his enormous fortune as a special emissary for Quadrant. He is the man who buys and sells kings and presidents, prime ministers, senators and congressmen, bankers and supposed patriots for Quadrant. He is the master of the treacherous payoff. This man knows enough to turn the whole political world upside-down. He is a genius at skulduggery. This man knows enough to blow Quadrant International out of the

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water for a long time."

"And I go to him and say, 'Please, Mr. Fahid, tell me something that will help me get my girl back?' " Dark sounded bitter. "He would laugh himself sick."

"Not if he was too frightened to laugh," Chambrun said.

"And what could frighten him that much?" Dark asked.

"The presence of a believable fanatic," Chambrun said.

Mr. Dexter Fahid, trim and athletic-looking, his black hair and black mustache trimmed by a stylist—nothing so ordinary as a barber for Fahid—had concluded a most satisfactory evening. There had been a dinner at Twenty-One with a carefully chosen lady. The lady was chosen for a kind of elegance that would attract attention to her escort. Dexter Fahid enjoyed the spotlight. He enjoyed being stared at like a Hollywood star, and it was also good for his business, which was buying and selling people. He had to look—and smell, he thought—like money.

After Twenty-One there was an intimate night club with an enchanting girl singer. Dexter Fahid regretted, briefly, that he wasn't spending the evening with the entertainer. Ali, his cousin and bodyguard, had tried to arrange that for him without success on another occasion. Fahid accepted little defeats, like the girl singer, without too much regret because he never suffered big defeats. That was why he squired his lady of the evening around town in a Rolls-Royce driven by Ali, and why he could have supplied her with the same kind of transportation in London and Cairo, and could have flown her to those places in his own jet.

Tonight his impressive suite at the Beaumont—the daily rate for it would have staggered most people—was perfect for the occasion. Champagne in an ice bucket awaited him and the lady. They talked a little about fun places in different parts of the world. In the end the lady provided the delights for which Fahid had paid so handsomely.

But unlike a man who had conquered through courtship, Dexter Fahid did not take the lady home. He thanked her with courtesy and charm but Ali was given the job of transporting the lady. Ali had given his cousin and employer a slight smile just as he left.

"You mind if I take my time about this?" he asked.

Fahid didn't mind. He glanced at his watch. It was almost three o'clock in the morning. Ali wouldn't be back till breakfast time at the earliest, he told himself. Wearing an elegant silk dressing

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gown, Fahid stretched out on the couch in his living room, armed with a nightcap of Spanish brandy on the rocks, and picked up some papers that had to do with tomorrow's luncheon with a Syrian diplomat. He could almost taste the man's greed. There would be no problem persuading the Syrian to use his influence on behalf of Quadrant International. Fahid was just glancing at a column of figures when all the lights in his suite went out.

Now a man living in his own home is usually prepared for such emergencies. He has a flashlight hidden away somewhere, or candles. In the Beaumont where nothing ever went wrong Fahid was unprepared. He found his cigarette lighter on the coffee table beside the couch and flicked it on. It was absurdly inadequate in the high-ceilinged room but it showed him the telephone. He picked it up and was promptly answered by the switchboard operator.

"This is Dexter Fahid," he said. "All the lights seem to have gone out in 12C. Is it a general power failure?"

"No, Mr. Fahid. I'll have a maintenance man there at once. So sorry for the inconvenience."

Fahid, with the aid of his lighter, found the little vestibule at the entrance to his suite and opened the door into the hall. Bright lights everywhere. The door had an automatic closing spring and Fahid propped a small straight-back chair against it to keep it open. Enough light filtered through into the living room to let him see the portable bar in the corner where he refreshed his drink.

Dexter Fahid expected efficiency at the Beaumont, but he was surprised at how quickly the repairman arrived. Fahid was still pouring brandy when he was aware that the front door had closed. An extremely bright electric torch partially blinded Fahid as it was aimed straight at him.

"Thanks for coming so quickly," Fahid said.

"Sorry you've been inconvenienced," the repairman said. Behind the torch he was only a shape. "We'll just have a look at things."

Fahid could see a large black bag or tool kit put down on the table behind the couch. He saw the repairman's hand move in and out of the bag, placing objects on the table which he couldn't identify. The repairman's torch was suddenly aimed again at Fahid's half-blinded eyes.

"It is now time to start playing the game," the repairman said.

"I don't understand. Game?"

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"The game of life or death, Mr. Fahid," the repairman said. There was something about the deadly calmness of his voice that raised the small hairs on the back of Fahid's neck. He thought of Ali, his protector, now far away.

The light moved out of Fahid's eyes and focused on an object on the table. "Do you see what this is, Mr. Fahid?"

"You've blinded me with your torch," Fahid said, "but it looks like—it looks like a hand grenade."

"Quite correct. It is a hand grenade. You will do exactly what I ask of you, Mr. Fahid, or I will blow you, and me, and this whole wing of the hotel to hell and gone."

"You're joking, of course!" Fahid's laugh was forced and hollow-sounding.

"Would you be joking if your loved ones were dead or being tortured? Would you be joking if you had been subjected to torture yourself? No, Mr. Fahid, I'm not joking. You are the only person who can supply me with the ammunition to destroy my enemy. If you don't choose to give it to me I have no reason to go on living, and I certainly have no reason to preserve your life." A hand lifted the grenade from the table and out of the circle of light. "When I pull the firing pin on this grenade we will have less than five seconds, not even time for you to get to the front door, even if you could get past me."

"But what have I to do with you—or your enemy?" Fahid, of course, knew the answer to that. Quadrant International. Associating murder or torture with them was not inconceivable.

"Let's not waste time, Mr. Fahid." The repairman's torch focused on the table again. "This is a tape recorder. You will talk into that small microphone. You will identify yourself and then you will tell me what I need to know."

"But I have no idea what you need to know!"

"Names of people you have bribed for Quadrant. Names of diplomats who have betrayed their countries and under what circumstances. I need enough for the State Department and the C.I.A. to involve Quadrant in a worldwide scandal."

"How will you know if I am telling the truth?" Fahid asked, fencing for time—time to think.

"Because I already know much of the truth. I only need you to confirm it," the repairman said.

"It might be easier to be blown to pieces than to be punished for betraying my employers," Fahid said.

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"You will certainly die if you refuse me," the repairman said. "You must have prepared for such a moment, Mr. Fahid, with your secret bank accounts and your private plane. Sooner or later someone was certain to double-cross you." A hand reached out and lifted the grenade out of sight again. "Your decision has to be now. Time is running out."

Dexter Fahid was sweating. "I will be dead whatever I do," he said, in a shaken voice.

"You will certainly be dead if you don't give me what I ask for," the repairman said. "But I'll give you a chance to beat the other rap, Mr. Fahid. I'll give you one full day before I make the tapes public. In a day you can reach any safe place on earth you have prepared for yourself. Now, Mr. Fahid—or never."

Fahid moistened dry lips, and then he reached for the little microphone. "My name," he began, "is Dexter Fahid. I am—or have been—a contact man, a dealer, for Quadrant International. Let me begin with the oil-producing countries in the Middle East—"

The cold was bone-chilling. The location was a little wooded area surrounding the fourth tee of a golf course in Westchester, some miles out of the city. Jason Dark stood beside a bench on which he had placed a black leather suitcase. He was warmly enough dressed for this winter night, and it occurred to him that what chilled him to the core was not the weather but fear that his plan, his and Pierre Chambrun's, would fail.

It was nine o'clock at night, a moonlit night. It was almost 14 hours since Dexter Fahid had finished talking into Dark's tape recorder in suite 12C at the Beaumont. It had taken three hours for Dark to have copies of the tapes made and to dispose of the copies in a satisfactory fashion. Then he had gone home to his duplex apartment on East 40th Street to wait. This was the day when Sharon's kidnapers had said they would contact him.

He had had no sleep, but he couldn't sleep. Sleep would be filled with nightmares, he told himself. Once, shortly after noon, the phone rang.

"This is not the call you are waiting for, Jason," Pierre Chambrun's cool voice said. "But I thought you should know that our friend, Mr. Fahid, has taken off. He checked out of the hotel shortly after nine o'clock. He'd asked for his bill earlier, but he apparently had to wait for his cousin and bodyguard to return

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from somewhere. His private jet took off from Kennedy a little after eleven, heading for Argentina according to the control tower. He didn't keep a luncheon appointment with a Syrian diplomat, nor did he leave any excuse or explanation for that gentleman. I think that is important for you to keep in mind."

"Why?" Dark asked in a flat dull voice.

"To give you hope," Chambrun said. "If Fahid wasn't in full flight he would have left some word for the Syrian gentleman. He was to have been a customer. It tells me that what is on the tapes is genuine."

Hope, God knows, he needed. But the day wore on and twilight came and there was no word from Sharon's kidnapers. Then there was darkness. Then there was the call.

There were instructions on how to reach the fourth tee of a certain golf course. Dark was to bring with him the evidence they had tried to get from him once before during the brutal destruction of his hand. He was to be at the designated place at nine o'clock.

"How do I know that Sharon Evans is alive and that you will turn her over to me unharmed?"

The caller allowed himself a brief chuckle. "You will have to take my word for it, friend."

Now Dark waited on that wintry golf course. It was a few minutes past nine, and Dark's anxiety mounted. Perhaps they had learned, since their call, about Fahid. Perhaps they wouldn't come. If they didn't he knew he would never see Sharon again. The gamble he and Chambrun had taken would be lost.

"Dark!" It was a muffled voice.

A man walked out of the woods, his face covered with a ski mask. Months ago two men wearing ski masks had destroyed Dark's right hand. This could be one of those men. Dark felt a pulse beating at his throat.

"The evidence is in that bag?" the man asked.

Dark bent down and opened the bag. All that was in it was a cassette tape player. "Before I turn this over to you I would like you to listen to something," he said. He turned on the player which was already loaded.

" 'My name is Dexter Fahid,' " a tinny-sounding voice said. " 'I am—or have been—a contact man, a dealer for Quadrant International. Let me begin with the oil-producing countries in the Middle East—' "

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The voice went on, naming names, quoting sums of money. The man in the ski mask stood motionless, listening. After a while Dark switched off the machine in mid-sentence.

"There are four full tapes of this information," he said. "I apologize for the quality of the recording, but of course this is a copy. The original tapes are in the hands of friends. If they don't hear from me by nine thirty—which is exactly twenty-two minutes from now—they will be turned over to the State Department and the C.I.A."

"Your price?" the man asked, quite calmly.

"Sharon Evans, safe and unharmed."

"And if we deliver her?"

"Then the tapes will stay where they are," Dark said.

"Can we depend on it?"

Dark gave the man a thin smile. "You will have to take my word for it, friend."

Ski-mask was still motionless. "I cannot produce Miss Evans in twenty-two minutes."

"Twenty minutes and thirty seconds now," Dark said.

"How long will it take you to get back to your apartment?" the man asked.

"Fifty minutes."

"Go, then. Miss Evans will be waiting for you when you arrive. But I must have those tapes. My superiors must know why I have made a deal with you—if I am to survive."

"Help yourself," Dark said. "There are several copies. You may even have the player."

Forty-eight minutes later Dark unlocked the door of his apartment on East 40th Street and Sharon came running across the room and into his arms. They clung to each other like children who had been lost.

She told her story. She had been held in a private house only a few blocks away by men in ski masks. She had been well treated. They had brought her here only a few moments ago and told her to expect Dark.

"Oh, Jason, you gave up the evidence you suffered so much to keep!" She pressed her cheek against his black-gloved hand.

"On the contrary," he said. "I got even better evidence against them." He told her of Chambrun's scheme and how he had persuaded Dexter Fahid that he was a dangerous fanatic. He told

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her about his meeting on the golf course. "Tomorrow," he said, "an international scandal will break that will make Watergate look like a kindergarten exercise."

"You double-crossed them!" she said, almost laughing. "You told them the tapes would stay where they were if I was produced."

"The exact truth," Dark said. "Because the tapes have been at the State Department and the C.I.A. since early this afternoon." He held her close, touched her soft blonde hair with the fingers of his left hand. "Chambrun persuaded me to play the role of a fanatic," he said. "It worked. But then I discovered I really was a fanatic—on the subject of your safety. Nothing could persuade me to refrain from punishing them—for having dared to touch you, love."

He reached for the telephone on the table behind the couch on which they were sitting. "Time to let the boys in Washington know that you're safe and they can go ahead and lower the boom."

NEXT MONTH...

13 ***NEW*** stories—including

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Captain Leopold)

RUTH RENDELL (about Inspectors Wexford and Burden)

THOMAS WALSH (about the Padre)

NEDRA TYRE (about a dower chest)

DAN J. MARLOWE (about Chief of Police Wampler)

RON GOULART (about Hollywood)

The November issue of EQMM will be on sale October 4

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a *NEW* detective story by

JACK RITCHIE

Another case from the casebook of Henry Turnbuckle, private investigator . . . It started like an old chestnut—a case of amnesia—but it ended like a fresh walnut, full of new wrinkles . . .

THE WILLINGER PREDICAMENT

by JACK RITCHIE

My client leaned forward. "I would like to know who I am."

I nodded understandingly. "Amnesia?"

"Exactly."

"I assume you have consulted your wallet, sir? Do you have a driver's license or perhaps a library card?"

He was in his mid-thirties, of slight build, and wearing shell glasses. "I have a driver's license and the usual number of credit cards, not to mention my social security number, but they tell me only who I am *now*. Not who I *was*."

"How long have you had this amnesia, sir?"

"Slightly more than six years."

I pondered that. "And now—after six years—you at last want to find out who you are? Or were? Haven't you had any curiosity about that before?"

"Oh, yes. Plenty of curiosity. However I did not think it was prudent to press the matter."

I waited for his explanation.

"On a warm evening six years ago," he said, "I found myself sitting beside a bush in a small-town park up north with a dreadful headache and also the realization that I simply did not know who I was. It was really quite frightening."

I sympathized. "I should imagine. But at that time did you not check your pockets for a wallet or other identification?"

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"My very first action. But my pockets contained no wallet. I had absolutely no identification on my person."

"You mentioned that it was a small town? In small towns people go about recognizing one another. Couldn't you have asked someone who you were?"

"I thought of that. But it did seem a bit too embarrassing to resort to as a first measure. No, I had something else to go on and I decided to try that first."

"And the something else was?"

"A key. Except for that—and a handkerchief and a comb—my pockets were empty. The fiberboard tag attached to the key was numbered and the lettering indicated that it belonged to a locker in the town's bus station."

"Naturally you went to the bus-station locker?"

"Naturally. And I found a briefcase inside the locker. It contained two hundred thousand dollars. All of it in one-hundred-dollar bills."

I nodded thoughtfully. "On your way to this bus station you must have encountered people? Were there any nods, hellos, or that sort of thing?"

"There were absolutely no signs of recognition from anyone. From which I gathered that I was a stranger in town."

I adopted the same conclusion. "Since you had no car keys on your person, one would guess that you probably had arrived in town by bus. You deposited a briefcase in the locker and pocketed the key. You then left the station and for some reason went to this park. There, it would seem, you were mugged. Struck on the head and relieved of your wallet. Something rather rare to occur in a small town, but nevertheless possible. And when you regained consciousness, you fond that you had amnesia. Were the bills old or new?"

"They appeared to have been in circulation before."

"What were you wearing?"

"A rather cheap suit, and one of my shoes needed resoling. Otherwise I was clean-shaven and fairly well-groomed."

"Ah, yes," I said. "And what came to your mind as you gazed on all that money?"

"It seemed fairly obvious to me that I was not the type of person who made a habit of carrying two hundred thousand dollars about in a briefcase. The thought immediately crossed my mind that I was either an embezzler or had just robbed a bank."

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"I gather you did not consider taking the matter to the police?"

"Certainly not. I did not relish being clapped into jail if I were guilty of either crime." He sighed. "But even if I possessed the money innocently, I knew instinctively that I had never handled so much of it before in my life and that it was highly unlikely that I ever would again. In short, I yielded to the temptation. I left town with the briefcase and its contents and I did not stop until I reached the West Coast two days later."

He smiled faintly. "Yes, the last six years have been remarkably good to me. I worked hard. I prospered. Today I am a relatively wealthy man."

"And so now you return to the mid-west to find out who you really were and possibly to make restitution to whoever really owns the two hundred thousand dollars?"

"Exactly. However by no means do I necessarily wish to resume my old identity, whatever that was. I am quite content to be who I am today. I am merely curious about the past." Then he frowned slightly. "And yet there is something else which seems to disturb me at times. Besides taking the money. But for the life of me I cannot put my finger on what it is."

"Do you remember the date and the town in which you acquired your amnesia?"

"Blue River Falls. On June 17, 1971. It is a small town some two hundred miles to the north of here."

"How did you leave Blue River Falls? By bus?"

"No. I discovered there would be no bus leaving until the next day and I did not want to wait that long. I walked to the town's railway depot and just managed to catch the one and only train stopping at Blue River Falls. It took me to Chicago and from there I transferred to another train west."

"Your name, sir?" I asked. "The one which you use now."

"It will not be necessary for you to know who I am. I will keep in touch with you."

"Do you have a photograph or a snapshot I could use?"

"You will have to do without one. I do not want you flashing my likeness to anyone, especially since I am possibly a fugitive from the law. This must be kept strictly confidential. Simply find out who I was and what I did to get the money."

He took out his wallet and began counting out my retainer. One of the bills drifted to the floor and he bent down to retrieve it. When he rose, he bumped his head on the edge of my desk.

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He swore and caressed the injured portion of his skull.

I waited hopefully and then asked, "By any chance did that bump restore—"

He shook his head. "No. I've bumped my head dozens of times in the last six years and I don't think a bump will restore my memory. On the other hand, perhaps some emotional shock, revelation, or trauma might just do the job."

Early the next morning I drove my car north, arriving in Blue River Falls at ten A.M. I found that the bus-station ticket office occupied a small section of a drugstore on Main Street. It also contained a bench for waiting passengers and a dozen metal lockers against one wall.

I approached the counter. "Do you have a bus schedule?"

I was handed a single card and I discovered that the Northern Bus Line was the only line to serve the area. In the morning the run began at Clayton and ended at Regansville. In the evening the route was retraced from Regansville back to Clayton.

I decided to work on the assumption that my client had been on the evening bus to arrive here. In that case the only town on the line he could have come from would be Regansville, since Blue River Falls was its second stop on the evening run.

I returned to my car and drove twelve miles to Regansville. I parked my car and wandered about, past the offices of the weekly *Regansville Gazette,* until I found the public library.

At the desk I inquired about the periodical room.

The librarian, a dark-haired young woman of perhaps 30, directed me downstairs to the basement where I found a nicely lighted room containing a half dozen elderly citizens at a table reading current newspapers and magazines.

I searched the wide shelves in the rear of the room until I found the back issues of the *Regansville Gazette.* I selected the large bound volume covering the year 1971 and brought it back to the table.

I leafed through the pages, finding nothing of immediate concern until I reached the week of June 21.

Yes, by George, it was all there. On the front page of the *Regansville Gazette.* Pictures—including one of my client. And at that time his name had been Arnold Willinger.

It seemed that on June 15, James Dougherty, twelve-year-old son of Cletus Dougherty, president and owner of the Dougherty Shoe Factory in Regansville, had failed to show up for supper.

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Instead, his father had received a phone call and been informed by a man's voice that his son had been kidnaped and that the kidnapers wanted $200,000 for the safe return of the boy.

Dougherty was also warned that if he went to the police he would never see his son alive again. The ransom—all of which was to be in $100 bills—was to be put into a briefcase and taken to the Blue River Falls bus station where it was to be deposited in one of the lockers. They key to the locker was then to be left in a crack at the base of an equestrian statue in the Blue River Falls park.

Dougherty gathered the money, put it into the briefcase, and sent it off with one of his bookkeepers—one Arnold Willinger.

And that was the last anyone saw of the money—or of Arnold Willinger.

At eleven that evening Doughtery had received another call from the kidnapers demanding to know why the ransom money had not been delivered.

Dougherty had protested that someone had been sent out but that something must have gone wrong. However, he promised the kidnapers that he would immediately raise another $200,000 and this time act as the messenger himself.

While the negotiations had been going on, the Dougherty boy had been kept confined to a log cabin in the woods near Regansville. And during the early morning hours of the next day the boy—evidently a cool resourceful fellow—managed to free himself from his bonds while his abductors were asleep. The boy had sneaked quietly out of the cabin, made his way through the woods to a road, and flagged down a car. An hour later he led the sheriff and his deputies back to the cabin where they woke the kidnapers—strangers in the area—and arrested them.

I read the account over again and then went back upstairs to ask the librarian for directions to the Dougherty Shoe Factory. I drove to the site, a large three-story structure occupying half of a town block.

In the office section of the building I made further inquiries and eventually found myself talking to a Miss Henson, Dougherty's private secretary.

She was a rather striking woman, well-endowed, and with blue-green eyes. She asked why I wanted to see Mr. Dougherty.

I smiled mysteriously and told her that it was a confidential matter for his ears alone.

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She regarded me dubiously, then shrugged and entered Dougherty's office.

While I waited for her return, my attention was drawn to a framed photograph on Miss Henson's desk. It depicted a women's bowling team, the central figure of which, Miss Henson, clutched a trophy of some sort.

Miss Henson returned from the inner office. "Mr. Dougherty will see you."

Dougherty, a large man in his fifties, offered me a seat and waited.

"My name is Turnbuckle," I said. "Henry Turnbuckle. I am a private investigator."

He was not impressed. "So?"

"Mr. Dougherty, some six years ago, your son was kidnaped."

He nodded cautiously. "That's right."

"The kidnaper demanded two hundred thousand dollars. You raised the money and dispatched it off with one Arnold Willinger. He was to deposit it in a bus-station locker in Blue River Falls."

Dougherty's face reddened with the memory of it. "Arnold disappeared and so did my money."

"Mr. Dougherty," I said, "I am in a position to see to it that the two hundred thousand dollars is returned to you."

He quickly sat up. "If you know where Arnold is, you'd better turn him over to the police."

"I honestly do not know where he is at this moment. However, he has contacted me and offered to return the money he took from you. If I made an effort to trap him for the police and the effort failed, he would undoubtedly simply disappear again and you would still be out the two hundred thousand dollars." I shook my head. "I think you should settle for the money and leave Arnold alone."

Dougherty gave it some thought and then shrugged. "I'll be satisfied with the money."

I nodded. "And you shall have it. However, if I may, I would like to ask you a few questions. When you were informed that your son had been kidnaped, you were also, I understand, cautioned not to go to the police?"

"And I didn't. They weren't in on any of it until after my son escaped."

"When you sent Arnold to Blue River Falls, did he know that your son had been kidnaped?"

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"No. My wife and I kept that to ourselves."

"Did Arnold know that there was two hundred thousand dollars in the briefcase?"

"No. I just gave him the instructions for the delivery. Maybe he thought the whole errand a little strange, but he didn't ask any questions."

"Why did you select Arnold to deliver the money?"

"Actually I wanted to deliver the money myself, but my wife talked me out of it. She was afraid I might lose my cool and do something to mess things up. She thought it would be better if we sent someone neutral, someone who wasn't emotionally involved. Arnold was just the nearest person available, so to speak."

"Did you perhaps have the foresight to at least make a list of the serial numbers of the ransom bills?"

"I did. Took down every one of the numbers myself and handed the list over to the police later." He rose and went to a filing cabinet. After a few moments of search he pulled out a sheaf of onion-skin paper. "Here they are."

I paged through the carbon copies. "Was any of the money ever recovered?"

"Not one cent. I suppose Arnold was able to fence it, or whatever people do to get rid of hot money."

Personally I doubted that Arnold would have that knowledge. "You said you 'took down' the numbers. Do you mean you typed this list?"

"No. I wrote them with a pen, then gave the list to my secretary, and she typed them for the police. That's one of the copies."

"Your secretary? Miss Henson?"

"Yes."

I handed the sheaf back to Dougherty, assured him that he would have his money returned soon, and said goodbye.

When I left his office, I saw that Miss Henson seemed to be off on an errand of some kind.

I waited for a while, but when she did not return I slipped the framed bowling photo into my pocket and departed.

I drove back down to the city and stopped at a photographer's shop near my office. I asked that an enlargement be made of Miss Henson alone.

I had that enlargement in my desk drawer when Arnold Willinger reappeared in my office at the end of the week. This time he carried a briefcase. "Have you found out who I am?"

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I nodded. "It all began with the kidnaping of the Dougherty boy."

He blinked.

I went on, "On June 15, 1971 the son of Cletus Dougherty, president of the Dougherty Shoe Company of Regansville, was kidnaped. His abductors demanded two hundred thousand dollars in ransom. Dougherty collected the money, put it into a briefcase, and gave it to you to deliver to a bus-station locker in Blue River Falls, from which point the kidnapers would pick it up."

He had paled. "It was ransom money?"

"Yes. You deposited the briefcase as instructed and were in the process of delivering the locker key as instructed when you were set upon by a mugger and relieved of your wallet and memory."

Arnold dabbed at his forehead with a handkerchief. "And the Dougherty boy? What happened to him?"

"He managed to escape from the cabin in which he was being held while his kidnapers were asleep. He made his way to the sheriff, who returned to the cabin with his deputies and apprehended the kidnapers." I smiled. "Your name is Arnold Willinger. You were a resident of Regansville and an employee of Dougherty's."

He sat there for a while rubbing his jaw. "Arnold Willinger? Arnold Willinger? It *does* seem to have a familiar ring. And I seem to see the vague outlines of a shoe factory."

"Excellent," I said. I removed the enlargement of Miss Henson from my desk drawer and flashed it suddenly before his eyes. "And who is she?"

Arnold stared at me for a moment and then back at the picture. "Ah, yes. It is slowly, slowly coming back to me. Benson, Jenson, Renson. No. *Henson*. But of course. I do believe that is Miss Henson."

I smiled triumphantly. "I knew that if anything in this world could jar you out of your amnesia, this photograph would do it."

He looked at me again. "Why did you think this photograph would do it?"

I folded my arms. "Because, my dear sir, when Dougherty collected the ransom money, he listed the serial numbers of every one of the bills. He then handed the list to Miss Henson so that she might make a typewritten copy for the police. And yet, throughout all these years, not a single bill of that ransom money has ever been recovered. Do you know why?"

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He opened his mouth to speak, but I held up a hand. "Because when Miss Henson typed that list, she changed one or two of the digits in each number."

Willinger frowned. "Why would she do that?"

"She did it so that when the bills were put into circulation, they would not lead to your arrest." I smiled again. "As your memory continues to return, you will remember that the relationship between you and Miss Henson was not exactly that of stranger to stranger." I chuckled. "How is your memory getting along now?"

"Just fine," he said. "Everything is swimming back. Except I don't see why Miss Henson should have altered those serial numbers. We were barely on nodding terms. To put it plainly, there was absolutely nothing whatsoever between us or likely to be. Did she *say* that she changed the numbers?"

"Well, no," I admitted a bit reluctantly. "However, I arrived at that conclusion through sheer deduction and irrefutable logic. How else could it be explained that not a single one of the ransom bills ever turned up in circulation?"

"That's easy," Arnold said. He patted the briefcase. "Because I never spent so much as a single bill of the ransom money."

My office was silent for at least fifteen seconds.

Arnold nodded. "That's right. Not one red cent. When I took the money to the West Coast, I really intended to go on a spending binge, but somehow I just couldn't bring myself to do it." He smiled. "On the very first day I got to the coast, I was offered quite a decent job with an expanding firm. And somehow just *having* the money in the background seemed to give me a sort of confidence I'd never had before. It represented security, a reserve I could dip into anytime I wanted to. But the occasion never rose. Everything just fell into place and today I am well off financially."

I glared at the briefcase. "You never touched a single bill of that money?"

"Not one blessed bill. This is even the original briefcase."

I sighed. "Oh, perfidious man. You never did have that damn amnesia."

He drew himself up. "Of course, I did."

"Nonsense," I said. "If you woke up penniless in Blue River Falls and did not touch any of the ransom money, then how did you manage to pay for the train tickets, not to mention the food you must have eaten on your way to the West Coast?"

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He winced at the hole in his story and decided to tell the truth. "All right. I did not have amnesia. After Dougherty gave me the briefcase and the weird instructions, my curiosity was aroused. I peeked into the briefcase, saw the money, and on impulse decided to steal it. Before I left town, however, I withdrew my savings account from the bank—close to one thousand dollars—and used that for my transportation, food money, and the like. Dougherty told me nothing whatsoever about the kidnaping. If I'd known that the life of his son was involved, I never would have taken the money at all. I simply assumed that Dougherty was indulging in something shady, like transferring cash to avoid income or corporation taxes. I didn't think in terms of ransom money at all."

I was not ready to forgive him. "Then why all this amnesia business? If you knew who you were and wanted to return the money, why the devil didn't you just mail the briefcase to Dougherty and let that be that?"

"Because I really want someone in Regansville—not Miss Henson, but the librarian—to believe I had had amnesia and I wanted you as a backup man, so to speak. When I 'recovered' my memory, it was my plan to send you back there again to find out if she was still single, and if she still cared, and if she might be willing to quietly slip out of town and go with me back to the West Coast."

He sighed. "How do you explain to a woman that you left her six years before just because you wanted to steal two hundred thousand dollars? Her pride would never accept that. But if I claimed it was all a case of amnesia, and you were willing to certify that the amnesia was genuine . . ."

The next morning I drove back to Regansville and returned the briefcase and the $200,000 to Dougherty.

I then stopped at the Regansville library and took the librarian, a Miss Turley, to one side and sketched out an edited version of Willinger's predicament.

Miss Turley blinked happily. "I just knew it had to be something serious like amnesia. I never did believe for one minute that he just took the money and ran away."

I nodded. "The most genuine and stubborn case of amnesia I've ever come across. Bumps on the head simply aren't sufficient to restore his memory, However, if you will come with me, I have the premonition that seeing someone of whom he was really very fond might just be the medicine that will snap him out of it."

And, of course, it was.

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a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

It was a child's crayon drawing of a house on stilts by the seashore—an eight-by-six-inch crude drawing that showed not the slightest evidence of artistic talent. Why should a piece of ordinary paper with amateurish crayon scrawls on it be worth Nick Velvet's minimum fee of $20,000? But you know Nick—he won't steal money or jewels or anything of value. But a child's worthless sketch? Well, you know what to expect—no, that's wrong. With Nick Velvet, the unique thief, you never know what to expect . . .

THE THEFT OF THE CHILD'S DRAWING

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The woman was plain and soft-spoken, with dark hair that could have been a wig and a baggy dress that could have been designed to hide her figure. "I want you to steal a child's drawing," she told Nick Velvet. "I'll pay you $20,000 for it."

"All right," Nick said, no longer surprised by the strangest of assignments. "Describe the drawing and tell me where it is."

They were in the front seat of the woman's rented car, parked off the cross-county expressway. Between them was her pack of filter cigarettes and a matchbook from Buccher Petrochemicals, but there was no other hint of her identity. She'd picked Nick up at a shopping center ten minutes earlier. "It's a crayon drawing of a house on stilts by the seashore—about eight inches wide by six inches high. The sort of thing you'd expect a six-year-old boy to do. His name is Jamie Jenkins, and it's on the bottom of the drawing."

"I guess I don't have to ask you if it's valuable," Nick said.

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"What?"

"I don't steal paintings or objects of art—or anything valuable, for that matter. But I guess a six-year-old child's crayon drawing doesn't qualify as an art object."

"Hardly."

"Where is it now?"

"Hanging up in Jamie's first-grade classroom, along with thirty others. They're having a parents' night later this week, and the drawings are displayed for that."

"Why not just walk in and take it?" Nick suggested. "Do you really need to pay me twenty thousand for it?"

"I can't be seen at the school," she answered vaguely. "I'd be recognized. Besides, it won't be as easy as all that. There's been occasional vandalism at the school and it's patrolled by teachers during the day and security guards at night. The doors are locked from the inside while classes are in session, to keep out troublemakers. And of course during parents' night the teacher is constantly in the room. If someone tried to take one of the drawings she'd probably call the guard."

"Things have changed since my school days."

"Indeed they have. Schools in some areas—especially around New York—are often more like armed camps."

"Is this school here in Westchester?"

"No, it's on Long Island—out beyond Garden City. I'll give you the address."

"Fine. Which night is that parents' gathering?"

"Thursday. They have it every spring about this time."

Nick nodded. "I foresee no problems. Shall I meet you on Friday at the same place?"

"Very good." She passed him an envelope containing his agreed-upon advance, then started the motor and drove back to the shopping center.

Gloria was watching television when he returned home. "How'd your meeting go, Nicky?"

"Smoothly," he answered, opening a beer and spraying himself with foam. "But I may need your help later in the week. Are you free Thursday evening?"

"Sure, Nicky. I'm seeing my sister tomorrow, but that's all."

"Good. We're going to take a drive down to Long Island and go back to school."

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Gloria's face lit up. "It's one of your government jobs, isn't it?"

"In a way."

"I'm glad you're taking me along. Sometimes I get lonesome just being home alone."

"We'll have to pretend to be parents asking the teacher about our son."

"Oh, Nicky!"

"It'll be easy. Nothing to worry about." He was already thinking about spending his fee. A new boat, perhaps, for cruising on the Sound this summer . . .

On Thursday they ate early and left home around 6:30 to drive down the expressway and across the Throgsneck Bridge to Long Island. The journey to the school took just over an hour, and Nick found the parking lot almost full of cars when they arrived.

"What do I do, Nicky?" Gloria wondered nervously.

"Just stick with me and look like the concerned mother of a first-grader."

Nick's client had written down the name of the teacher and they found her room without difficulty. The school was a sprawling one, with the rear wing serving as a junior high; but the corridors were well marked and a smiling security guard was on hand to direct the parents.

The first-grade teacher was Miss Blaine—Helen Blaine, a self-assured young woman who greeted the parents by name and pointed out their children's artwork on the wall above the blackboard.

"The blackboard is green!" Gloria observed.

"It's supposed to be easier on the eyes." Nick scanned the row of crayoned drawings, quickly finding the one he wanted. It was, he supposed, a sketch of a house on stilts by the seaside—but it could just as easily have been a box standing on toothpicks for all the artistic ability it showed. Only a mother would pay twenty grand for something like that, he decided, and wondered about his client's relationship to the boy.

"Can I help you?" the teacher, Miss Blaine, asked. The room had suddenly emptied of parents and they were alone with her.

"Is this our son's class?" Nick asked quickly, "or do we have the wrong room?"

"What's his name?"

"Nicky Velvet," Gloria answered before he could come up with another name.

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"No, he's not in this class, but we have three first grades. The others are down the hall."

"Such a nice classroom!" Gloria commented.

"It is, isn't it?" Next year we're going into an ungraded setup, with primary, intermediate, and junior high. It's worked well in other areas, and I believe it will improve the quality of education here."

Gloria had maneuvered her around the desk so her back was to Nick for just a moment. That was all the time he needed. He pulled off the paper clips holding the Jenkins boy's drawing to the taut wire above the blackboard, rolled up the drawing, and slipped it under his jacket. Then he substituted a crayon drawing of his own, of the same size, that he'd brought with him. It looked nothing like the Jenkins drawing, and the construction paper was a slightly lighter shade, but at least it filled the gap on the wall. At a quick glance Miss Blaine wasn't likely to notice the difference.

"We'd better find the right room," he suggested, interrupting the conversation. "Thanks for your help."

The teacher smiled. "Nice meeting you," she said, already turning her attention to another couple who'd entered the classroom.

"You were perfect," Nick told Gloria when they were outside.

"Oh, Nicky, I was frightened! Suppose she saw you taking that drawing!"

"But she didn't." He unlocked the car and held the door open for her.

"Why does the government want that drawing, Nicky?"

"That's a long story."

"Is it a code of some sort?"

"Not exactly." It would not have helped to explain that a woman who was probably the child's mother had hired Nick to steal it.

They drove back through the little suburban communities of Nassau, avoiding the Belt Parkway because now Nick was in no great hurry. He felt the rolled drawing in his pocket and hoped it wasn't getting crushed.

"How about a drink?" he asked Gloria.

"Sure!"

There was a motel up ahead and he swung into the parking lot. The car behind him turned in as well and parked about 50 yards away. "Wait here for me a minute," Nick told Gloria.

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He had a vague glimpse of two men getting out of the car, but even in the lighted parking area it was too dim to see their faces at that distance.

He went into the men's room off the lobby, waited for a few moments, then peeked out. The men were nowhere in sight. He'd been worrying needlessly. He went back outside and headed for his car.

Gloria was not there.

It took him a moment to grasp the fact, and his first thought was that she'd gone off to the ladies' room. But then he saw the note, rubber-banded to the turn-signal lever on the steering column.

He pulled it off and read: *If you want to see her alive again, give us the drawing. Take a room here as John Green and wait for our call in an hour. No tricks or she dies.* It was unsigned.

Nick stared at the note and felt a numbing chill begin to creep down his spine.

He registered as John Green and took a room at the rear of the first floor. He could think of nothing but Gloria. He'd always kept her out of it before, in ignorance of the true nature of his business. This time he'd brought her along to help and ended up placing her in mortal danger.

He sat on the bed, waiting for the phone to ring, and gradually the first wave of helplessness gave way to questioning.

Why had they taken Gloria instead of coming after him? Apparently to avoid damage to the drawing in a pitched battle. So it was valuable—but why?

He unrolled it and studied it in more detail. A box-like house with windows and a door, and something in the center that seemed to be a tall chimney or TV antenna, the whole thing supported by four stilts standing in the water. The water itself was blue, with scalloped waves across the bottom of the drawing. The rest was in black, with a flaming red sun looking down from the sky.

Jamie Jenkins would never be an artist—at least, not on the evidence of this one drawing.

He wondered about some sort of code, as Gloria had suggested, but could find nothing to support this idea.

He held a burning match under the drawing to warm the paper, but no invisible writing appeared.

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He turned it upside down, thinking that despite Jamie's name on the bottom it might be displayed wrong.

Nothing.

It was only a child's drawing.

So he waited.

Exactly on schedule the telephone rang.

"Hello," Nick said.

"Who is this?" a man's voice asked.

"John Green."

"Good. You found our note."

"I found it. What have you done with her?"

"Nothing, yet. We want that drawing."

"What drawing?"

"Don't play games, Mr. Green. The child's drawing you stole from Miss Blaine's classroom less than two hours ago."

"Oh, that one. I threw it away."

The voice on the telephone was hard and cold as ice. "Do you want to hear her scream, Mr. Green? We can arrange it. She's just in the next room."

"She was a pickup. I don't even know her name."

"That's not what she tells us. Her name is Gloria and yours is Nicky and she's lived with you for eleven years."

"All right," he said with a sigh.

"You have the drawing?"

"Yes."

"Who paid you to steal it?"

"Just bring her back and it's yours."

"We'll do that. Now listen carefully. It's a little after ten now. Stay in your room and don't make any phone calls. We'll know if you do. At ten thirty someone will knock on your door. *Don't open it!* Simply slide the drawing under the door and remain in the room. As soon as our man is safely back, we'll release Gloria. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Good." The caller hung up without another word and Nick listened to the buzzing in his ear.

He stared around the bleak motel room and wondered what to do next.

In the end he did what he'd been told to do.

He considered hiding in the corridor and jumping the man who

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came for the drawing, but that might endanger Gloria. He considered substituting a fake drawing, but he had no crayons or paper with him, and surely they knew what it looked like anyway.

So he contented himself with making a rough tracing of it on a sheet of motel stationery. When the knock came at the door 20 minutes later, he slipped the drawing under it as instructed.

As soon as it had disappeared, a voice came through the door. "All right, Mr. Green, you can open up now. We have her out here."

Nick unlatched the door and started to open it. Only at the last instant did some sixth sense warn him to step aside and hit the light switch. As the room was plunged into darkness he saw the quick spurts of flame and heard the cough of silenced bullets.

He dropped to the floor, rolling as he went, reaching out for any weapon to defend himself. One of the gunmen stood in the doorway silhouetted against the hallway lights, fumbling for the wall switch. As he found it and lit up the room, Nick hurled a phone book at him. The aim was bad, but the gunman was distracted long enough for Nick to spring. They tumbled into the hallway together, rolling over on the carpeted floor.

Nick managed to wrench the silenced pistol from the gunman's hand and subdue him with a quick jab of his fist. Glancing quickly up and down the empty corridor, he took the man by the collar and dragged him back into the room. "Now you're going to talk!" Nick said. "Where's your partner?"

"I don't know."

"Where's Gloria?"

"Don't know."

"Who's paying you?"

"Don't—"

Nick slapped him across the face. "Your partner took the drawing and ran. You were supposed to kill me. Did you kill Gloria too?"

"No. She's gone."

"Where?"

"I don't know. We turned her over to a guy in a fancy car—a Lincoln, I think. He's the one who paid us."

"How'd you get onto me so quick tonight?"

"Someone phoned a tip, with your license number. We spotted your car a few miles from the school."

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Nick stood up, releasing the man but keeping the gun. "Get out of here. If I see your face again I'll kill you."

The man hesitated a moment, then Nick raised the pistol an inch and the man decided to go while he could.

Alone, Nick was assailed by doubts once more. Should he have called the police, or tried to beat more information from the man? He didn't know. All he knew was that now he'd lost both Gloria and the drawing, and it was becoming more difficult to think rationally.

Sometime after eleven he found the ground-floor apartment six blocks from the school. He could make out a single glowing light inside, and he pushed the buzzer. After a moment the door opened a crack and a voice asked, "Who is it?"

"Helen Blaine?"

"Yes—who is it?"

"My wife and I were in your classroom earlier this evening. I have to talk to you."

She opened the door a bit but kept the chain on. "What about?"

"I'm trying to locate one of your pupils."

"At eleven fifteen at night?"

"It's urgent. A matter of life and death."

"Which pupil?"

"His name is Jamie Jenkins. I called all the Jenkins families in the local phone book, but none of them—"

"Oh, come on in," she decided, closing the door far enough to remove the chain. "Why do you need to find Jamie tonight?"

Once inside the apartment Nick saw that the glow of light came from a color television set tuned to the late-night news but with the sound turned down. The place was well furnished for a teacher's salary, and Nick wondered if she shared it with a friend.

"My wife has disappeared," he explained. "I think she's been kidnaped. And I think it has something to do with that drawing the Jenkins boy made."

"But how could that be?"

"I just can't explain it all now. But I have to find the boy."

"Well, you're right about his not living in town." She wrapped a padded housecoat more tightly around her. "Jamie's father is some sort of construction engineer. He's away from home a great deal and they live in a trailer. It's in the next town because there are no trailer camps allowed here."

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"Could you take me to it?"

"Not now, I couldn't."

"It's terribly important," Nick insisted.

"Have you contacted the police?"

"No. The police can't help me now. They'd only waste valuable time asking foolish questions."

She studied his face, hesitated, and then nodded. "All right—I don't know what I'm getting myself into but I'll take you. Wait outside while I get dressed."

Nick went out and stood by his car, glancing up and down the street to be certain no one was following him. It was a neighbourhood where the houses were dark by eleven o'clock on a weeknight, and he could see no sign of life. After about five minutes Helen Blaine appeared, wearing black slacks and a black sweater. "The perfect costume for prowling at night," he commented.

"Just who are you, anyway?"

"Right now, a pretty desperate man. That's all you need to know. Which way should I drive?"

"Turn right at the next light. I'll guide you from there."

It took them nearly a half hour to reach the trailer camp in the next town and by then it was midnight. "We can't wake them now," the teacher said.

"Maybe we won't have to. Is that their trailer ahead?"

He indicated a pool of light in the otherwise darkened area. The door to one of the trailers stood open and there was some sort of activity inside.

"I see a car," Helen Blaine said.

"They're taking someone out. We may be just in time."

Nick could make out a man carrying something wrapped in a blanket, and his first thought was of Gloria. He swerved his car over a line of whitewashed stones, through somebody's newly planted garden, and straight at the man with the blanket. The man dropped his burden and jumped aside as Nick slammed on the brakes. Then he was out of the car, running toward the bundle on the ground.

It wasn't Gloria.

It was a small boy of about six, only half awake but thoroughly terrified.

"Don't worry," Nick assured him. "I won't hurt you. I'll bet you're Jamie."

"Y-yes."

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Nick glanced around for the man who'd been carrying the boy, but he'd vanished in the darkness. From somewhere nearby came the sound of a car starting up. "Where's your mother and father?"

"My mom's in there," he said, pointing a shaky finger at the doorway of the mobile home.

"Take care of him," Nick told Helen. "I'll go look."

He found the boy's mother on the bed at the back of the trailer. A gag was stuffed into her mouth and her hands and feet were tied. "My God!" she gasped as Nick freed her. "Where's Jamie?"

"He's safe outside. Tell me what happened."

"Are you the police?" she asked, and when Nick seemed to nod she hurried on. "My husband's away, working. I'd put Jamie to bed and was watching TV when there was a knock on the door. I thought it was one of the neighbors, but when I opened it this man jumped on me and tied me up."

"Did you know him?"

"Never saw him before."

"Did he say anything?"

"Only that I shouldn't struggle, and that he wasn't going to hurt me."

"Did he mention Jamie?"

"No! I was tied up and gagged before I realized he was taking the boy."

Something about her use of that phrase struck an odd note with Nick. He was reminded of his original theory that the nameless woman who hired him might be Jamie's mother. "Mrs. Jenkins, is Jamie your son?"

"My step-son. Herb was married before. But I love him like my own."

"I'm sure you do. But isn't it odd that your husband got custody of the child, especially when his business keeps him away so much?"

"Who said he's away so much?"

"Construction engineers often are."

"Well, his first wife was no good. She hated him and she hated me."

"Where is she now?"

"Heaven knows! She certainly never wanted to be saddled with a child."

Helen Blaine entered with Jamie then, ending the conversation. "He's so tired," she said. "I think he'll go right back to sleep."

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Nick hated losing time, but he knew the boy could be of more help in the morning. "All right," he decided. "Tuck him in."

"It's Miss Blaine, isn't it?" Mrs. Jenkins said, recognizing Jamie's teacher for the first time. "Whatever are you doing here?"

"She's been a big help to us," Nick remarked vaguely. "Now I really think we should remain here till morning, for your protection. That kidnaper could come back. Maybe Miss Blaine could sleep in here on the couch and I could sleep out in the car."

"Do you think that's necessary?" Mrs. Jenkins asked. But the memory of their narrow escape was too fresh in her mind for argument. "All right," she decided. "It probably would be best if you stayed. But don't you need to call in a report of this?"

"I'll do it on the car radio," Nick told her. If she still thought of him as a detective he wasn't going to change her mind.

Outside, Helen Blaine caught up with him. "What's this about staying here overnight? I only agreed to show you the place!"

"There's a danger to the child. I need to talk to him the first thing in the morning, and I have to be certain he'll be here. I'm staying the night, and unless you want to walk home you'd better stay too."

She tossed her fluffy short hair. "Oh, all right! But you'll have to get me back to school by eight thirty."

"Maybe you and Jamie will both be truants tomorrow."

Nick awakened with the first streaks of dawn in the eastern sky, thinking about Gloria and wondering if she was still alive. He climbed out of the car, stretched his cramped muscles, and ignored a woman from the next trailer who eyed him with suspicion.

He knocked on the door of the Jenkins mobile home and waited until Helen opened it. "Are you up already? It's not even seven."

"Teachers should be used to early rising. Is the boy awake yet?"

"I heard him rummaging around just now."

Behind her, Jamie Jenkins appeared. He was fully dressed. "You gonna take me to my dad?"

"Maybe," Nick said. "Come sit down here by me."

Mrs. Jenkins came to the door wearing a housecoat. "You want breakfast?"

"Just some juice and a piece of toast, please," Nick replied. "And maybe you can give me some information. Jamie here did a drawing for Miss Blaine's class—a crayon sketch of a house on

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stilts, by the water. Would you know where that house is?"

"It was somewhere Jamie went with his father a few weeks ago. Out on the Island somewhere."

"The Hamptons? I've seen a few houses like this out there."

"I don't know. I wasn't along."

Nick turned his attention back to the boy. "Jamie, do you remember where the house was that you drew?"

"I don't know."

"Could you draw it again?"

"Sure, I guess so."

Helen Blaine took over. "Go get your crayons, Jamie. We'll have a little class right here."

The boy returned with the familiar yellow and green crayon box and a sheet of paper. "It was like this," he said, drawing first the blue waves at the bottom of the picture and then the house on its stilts. "Dad helped build it."

"And he took you there, right?" Nick urged.

The boy nodded. "One day a couple of weeks ago."

"Mrs. Jenkins, do you have any idea where your husband Herb is, or whom he's working for?"

"Well, I can tell you who he works for, if that's any help. He's with Buccher Construction Company. You know—Terence Buccher?"

Nick knew. "Buccher's Island, out in the Sound? Supposed to be one of the world's richest men, isn't he?"

"So they say. You'd never know it by what my Herb brings home in his pay envelope, though. Of course some of his money still goes to Jamie's mother."

"Tell me about your mom, Jamie," Nick said. "Do you see her often?"

"This is my mom," he said.

"I mean your other mom. Didn't she come to see you at school recently."

"Y-yes. How'd you know? It was on the way to school, really."

"I just guessed. She saw your drawing too, I'll bet, and asked you about it."

"Yes," he agreed.

"Did you tell her where the house is?"

"Just that it was on the water."

"I can see the water in your drawing, Jamie. These are nice waves."

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Helen Blaine stood up. "I should be at school, and so should Jamie."

But Nick shook his head. "I've got a better idea. We're all going for a boat ride."

"A boat ride? Where?"

"Over to Terence Buccher's private island in the Sound. Come on, let's get going."

Nick handled the rented powerboat with ease. The waters of Long Island Sound were relatively calm for April, and the craft was much smaller than his own cruiser anyway. But steering a boat without Gloria at his side was an odd feeling. Staring ahead at the wooded shoreline of Buccher's Island, he wondered if he would find her there, wondered if his guesswork had any substance to it at all.

"I'm cold," Jamie complained.

Nick smiled down at him. "We're almost there now. Weren't you cold when you came over here with your dad?"

"No, the boat had an inside."

Helen Blaine smiled. "How'd you know he came over here?" she asked Nick.

"He's a detective, isn't he?" Mrs. Jenkins replied before he could answer.

"That's right—I'm a detective." He steered the boat in toward shore. There was no docking facility in sight, so he took a chance and beached it in shallow water. "Don't ever do that," he told the boy. "If there'd been rocks I could have torn open the bottom." He helped Jamie and the two women to shore, then looked around. "Buccher's house must be on the other side of this woods."

"Hold it right there!" a voice commanded, and Nick turned to see a tall bearded man with a rifle pointed in their direction. "This here's private property. You could be shot for trespassin'."

"The law doesn't back you up on that any more," Nick informed him. "You pull that trigger and you're in a peck of trouble."

The man kept the rifle steady. "What do you want here?"

"To see your boss, Mr. Buccher. Take us to him."

"With pleasure. Walk ahead of me with your hands in the air."

They obeyed, with Nick and the boy in front, followed by the two women. The island was heavily wooded and alive with wildlife. It was hard to believe they were less than a hundred miles from Manhattan.

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Almost at once the big house came into view. It was constructed in a modified Victorian style, with heavy carved ornaments and elaborate moldings ringing the windows. "It's like a Gothic novel!" Mrs. Jenkins exclaimed.

"A bad Gothic novel," Nick said. He could feel his pulse racing, knowing that he might learn Gloria's fate within minutes.

They were ushered into a high, beamed living room with portraits of ancestors looking down from the walls. A tall bald man entered, perhaps summoned by some silent alarm system. "Good morning, I'm Terence Buccher. I don't usually welcome visitors before noon."

"This is a special case," Nick told him. "I've come for Gloria."

"Gloria? Who is she?"

"The woman you kidnaped from my car last night."

The bald man smiled. "I assure you I don't stoop to kidnaping. You're quite mistaken."

"You tried it again later last night, with Jamie here. Not you personally, of course. You hire people for that sort of work."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Nick pulled Jamie's drawing from his pocket. "They only got one of them last night. Here's another. What are you going to do about that?"

Buccher's eyes suddenly hardened. "I'll show you what I'm going to do, Mr. Velvet."

"Ah, you know my name!"

"I know everything about you." He turned to the bearded man. "Keep him covered, Otto." Then, "Helen, please relieve Mr. Velvet of that drawing and bring it to me."

Helen Blaine took the drawing from Nick's hand. "Showing your true colors at last, I see," Nick said to her.

"Did you know?"

"Of course I knew. Someone had to phone them the minute I stole the first drawing and give them my license number. Someone had to warn them I was on my way to see the boy, so they could spirit him away. You phoned while I waited for you to get dressed last night."

"What is all this?" Mrs. Jenkins demanded. "Where's my Herb?" But no one was listening to her.

"You can destroy all the drawings you want," Nick told Buccher, "but I know your secret."

"You don't know a thing, Mr. Velvet." Buccher slipped his arm

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casually about Helen Blaine's slim waist.

Nick smiled. His only chance of learning about Gloria was to convince Buccher that Nick held the upper hand. "Jamie's drawing seems to be of a house on the shore, built on stilts to protect it at high tide. But there's no shoreline in the picture, and he told me this morning the house was *on the water.* Now a six-year-old child wouldn't be likely to use the preposition *on* to indicate immediate proximity, as *a house on the lake.* He used *on* to mean *on top of,* and his drawing bears that out. The house is *on top of* the water."

Terence Buccher shrugged. "A boy's imagination."

"I don't think so, because he drew me that second picture, almost identical to the first. Something he imagined would likely be different the second time around."

"I didn't imagine it!" Jamie insisted. He pointed toward the window. "It's right out there!"

"I think it is too, Jamie," Nick said. "Buccher Construction is just a subsidiary of Buccher Petrochemicals, isn't it?"

"Of course," the bald man replied.

"And the thing you've built, out there on the other side of the island where it's sheltered from public view, is Jamie's house on the water—an oil drilling platform."

"I'd be foolish to deny it," Buccher said. "It's in a cove facing the open sea, well hidden from outside view. But we're only doing a bit of test drilling. It'll be down within the week."

"Not soon enough," Nick said. "Drilling for oil under Long Island Sound? What do you think the environmentalists would say? And the other oil companies? And the government? You know what's down there now, and you can use all your money and influence in Washington to turn that knowledge to your advantage. But tell me, why drill in the water rather than right here on the island?"

"The island is an outcropping of solid rock, much like Manhattan. We went beyond the rock for easier drilling." He spread his hands wide. "But enough of this talking, Velvet. How much money do you want?"

"No money. I want Gloria, and I want Jamie's drawing back."

Buccher hesitated, seeming to debate the points in his own mind. "The first drawing was destroyed."

"That second one will do nicely."

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"I could have you killed, you know."

"Your men missed the chance in that motel room. Now there are too many witnesses. I'm sure you wouldn't kill Mrs. Jenkins and Jamie."

"What's all this talk about killing?" Mrs. Jenkins demanded. "Where's Herb?"

"I'll get Herb," Buccher said finally, with something like a sigh. He looked a great deal like the pasty-faced portraits on the wall. "And I'll get Gloria too."

Those were the words Nick had waited to hear. "She's alive?"

"Of course. When they failed to kill you last night I had to keep her alive as a bargaining tool. I didn't know what you might do. Besdies, killing women is a bit out of my line."

He spoke a few words into an intercom and after a short wait the rear door opened. Buccher did not even look around.

"Nicky!"

"I had a tough time finding you," Nick said simply.

She came into his waiting arms. "But I knew you would!"

"All right," Buccher said. "Now what do I get in return?"

"I don't call the police and charge you with kidnaping and attempted murder." He motioned toward one of the portraits on the wall. "And I keep quiet about some other things too."

Terence Buccher seemed to grasp his meaning. "Very well," he said with some reluctance. "It's a deal."

"The drawing, please."

Buccher handed it back to Helen Blaine. "Give it to him."

She brought it over, handed it to him, and said, "I'm sorry."

"No harm done. We all have our games to play."

A burly man in a yellow hardhat came through the door and Jamie let out a yell. "Daddy!" he shouted, and went running to greet him.

Nick smiled at Gloria. "The missing Herb Jenkins. A happy ending for everyone. Come on. It's time to go home."

Nick sat in the front seat of the dark-haired woman's rented car and passed the child's drawing over to her. "Here you are, as promised."

She smiled and handed him an envelope thick with currency. "And your money, as promised. Did you have any trouble?"

"Nothing I couldn't handle."

"Good."

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"You're Jamie's mother, aren't you?"

"How did you know?"

"He said his mother saw him one day on the way to school with the drawing. You knew what it was right away, didn't you?"

"Not immediately. Not till later when I remembered something Buccher had once told me about his plans. But I didn't know you saw Jamie."

"Just this morning. I saw his father too."

"Herb Jenkins?"

Nick shook his head. "Terence Buccher is Jamie's father. There's a portrait of a Buccher ancestor on the wall that looks just like Jamie."

"My God, you were on the island?"

"Yes. It was all very pleasant. I remembered you used a matchbook from Buccher Petrochemicals the other day to light your cigarette. That helped me find the right place. You were Jamie's mother, you were connected with Buccher, the ancestor looked like Jamie, and Buccher allowed Jamie on the island. It all added up to Buccher as his father. I suppose he pays Herb Jenkins to raise the boy, and Jenkins' wife thinks it's his child by an earlier marriage. Buccher even arranged for Jamie to attend school outside his own district, so Buccher's current girl friend could be his teacher."

"You learned a great deal in just two days."

Nick smiled. "It goes with the fee. No extra charge."

She gazed down at the drawing. "Thank you for this."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Exactly what Terence feared I might do."

A week later Nick learned what she'd meant. Gloria showed him *The New York Times* over breakfast, pointing out a two-column headline near the bottom of page one. *"Child's Drawing Reveals Secret Oil Drilling in Long Island Sound,"* he read.

"Is that what it was all about, Nicky?"

"Not entirely," he answered. "I guess it was about a woman scorned." He remembered the woman in the car, and how he'd felt when Gloria was missing, and Buccher with his arm around Helen, and little Jamie running to the man he called Dad. "No, I'll take that back. I guess it was just about love."

"Q"

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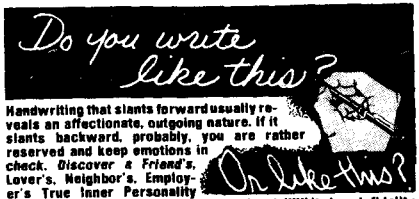

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